THIS NUMBER HAS ARTICLES ON

OBEEDIENCE ROBINS OF LONG BUCKBY

THE NORTHAMPTON PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY

WILLIAM SHIPLEY IN NORTHAMPTON c.1747-1754

THE CULWORTH GANG

KING’S CLIFFE: THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

WOAD-GROWING IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

THE BLACKSHIRTS IN NORTHAMPTON, 1933-1940

TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO: THE BATTLE OF YARDLEY CHASE

BOOK REVIEWS

JOURNAL OF THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE RECORD SOCIETY

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Cover illustration: The Ruins of Upper Catesby Church, July 1721
(The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire by John Bridges)
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Notes and News</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Obedience Robins of Long Buckby: A Seventeenth-Century Virginian</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Catherine Wilheit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Natura e Accedere Partes: The Northampton Philosophical Society Revisited</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David L. Bates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Shipley in Northampton c.1747-1754</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. G. C. Allan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Culworth Gang</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack Gould</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King’s Cliffe: The Catholic Connection</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Wąszak</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woad-Growing in Northamptonshire</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivien Billington</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blackshirts in Northampton, 1933–1940</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philip M. Coupland</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty-One Years Ago: The Battle of Yardley Chase</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. H. McKay</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Reviews</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obituary Notices</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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NOTES AND NEWS

There are many events being made to mark the arrival of the new millennium, not least the publication of several village histories and photographic books. Reviews of volumes about Wadenhoe and Charlton & Newbottle and are given below. Books describing the histories of Grafton Regis and Hellidon, and a new photographic volume about Kettering, are among the material received for review in next year’s NPP. Other smaller publications are also produced regularly by active village groups and societies such as Eydon, Flore and Helmdon. The Banbury Historical Society continues its thrice-yearly publications. Please let us have information about any new books that are about or relate to the County.

* * * * *

The Dean and members of Peterborough Cathedral Chapter, in their capacity as custodians of the Mellow’s Trust, have been active in seeking continued publication of the medieval cartularies and related Peterborough Abbey monastic documents. Three are currently in progress, one of which, the White Book, being the registers of two abbots during the years 1295-1321, is now approaching completion by Dr. Sandra Raban of Cambridge University (formerly of Wellingborough). The volumes will be published as part of the Northamptonshire Record Society series and there will be sufficient English translation to make these important manuscripts available to readers who have no Latin. Those parts of the documents that consist of rentals and terriers will be published entirely in English.

* * * * *

John Rigby, hon. secretary of the Friends of St. Peter’s, Northampton, tells us that the Friends have had a busy year. An important meeting is planned with Leicester University Centre for 3rd March 2001. The subject will be ‘William Smith, civil engineer and pioneer geologist’. Lectures will deal with William Smith’s life and work, the county historians George and Anne Baker, and Smith’s nephew, John Phillips, who was a professor of geology. The day will conclude with a visit to St. Peter’s Church. Details from Dr. Ian Foster, The University Centre, Barrack Road.

* * * * *

Mr. A. J. Sambrook of Southampton is writing an entry for the *New Dictionary of National Biography* about John Husbands (1706–32), fellow of Pembroke College, Oxford. The *Northampton Mercury* for 4th December 1732 records his death at ‘the Hon. Mr. Northey’s seat’. Does any reader know where this ‘seat’ was located? In may not necessarily be in Northamptonshire, and Compton Basset, Wiltshire, is a possibility, but any information about a Northamptonshire connection will be welcome.
This year we have, for the first time, gone to press with the whole text presented in electronic format. As well as reducing the cost, the technology will assist (another year) in preparation of an annual index, using computerized methods. Will all contributors please provide their articles in ‘Word’ on a disk (or send via e-mail; please let us know beforehand so that your article is not suspected of being a virus!). The Society can be contacted on Mondays and Wednesdays on 01604 762 297.

My thanks are due to authors and book reviewers, all of whom have presented their contributions on time. I would like to receive obituaries, including those of people who may not have been members of the Record Society, but who have contributed to the recent history of the County. Thanks also go to members of the Record Society Council for their help during the year, and to Leslie Skelton and Jean Hall for their help with NPP production in obtaining estimates (which can be surprisingly tedious) and for getting the volumes delivered to you all.

David Hall

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Dr. D. G. C. Allan is Honorary Historical Adviser to the Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts. He has published a monograph about William Shipley and, with J. L. Abbott, is joint author of ‘The Virtuoso Tribe,’ studies in the 18th-century work and membership of the London Society for the Arts, 1992. His most recent work is The RSA, A Chronological History, 1999.

Dr. David L. Bates is an industrial scientist at Cambridge and has contributed several articles to NPP.

Vivien Billington (nee Bearn) has a BA in Modern Languages from Oxford University. Her varied career has included writing for the Central Office of Information and starting a small import business whilst living in the United States. She started researching her Northamptonshire ancestry over 30 years ago.

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On 26th April 1601, Obedience, second of Richard Robins's six sons, was baptised at Long Buckby Parish Church, Northamptonshire. Evidence suggests that Richard Robins apprenticed Obedience to London apothecary Adrian Barton, and his fourth son, Edward to a merchant. Two successive generations of Robinses had produced nine younger sons, and Obedience and Edward emigrated to Virginia's Eastern Shore, the elder preceding the younger brother by a decade. In America, Obedience Robins combined public office with private enterprise to acquire status, economic security and land he could not inherit in England. Timing, good health, and ability contributed to his success. Before his death in 1662, Robins had patented 4,850 acres and served as vestryman, county court commissioner, commander and burgess. He left no personal papers, yet appears frequently in studies of colonial Virginia in conjunction with non-conformist activity, kinship networks and land ownership. The oldest continuous court records in the United States, dating from 1632 in Accomack, Virginia, are among the public papers which enable reconstruction of the strategies by which Robins established a position of power in colonial society between 1627 and 1645.

‘Obediens Robins, of Accawmacke, Chirurgion, Sworn and examined … at a Court at James Citty,’ 21st January 1627/8: this, the first record of Obedience Robins in Virginia, is the only time he is identified with medicine in America. When Robins crossed the Chesapeake Bay to attend James City Court, his testimony concerned an agreement made between Captain Wilcoxes and Walter Scott the previous October. If Robins served an apprenticeship in London until 7th February 1625/6, he emigrated within the following 19 months. On 24th January 1628/9, Obedience Robins made a second appearance at James City Court. George Medcalfe had filed suit against him, had him ‘arrested,’ and then failed to attend court himself. Robins was awarded 50 pounds of tobacco for his trouble in crossing the bay. The following year, Robins was one of four burgesses ‘for Accowmacke,’ at ‘The General Assembly holden the 24th of March, Anno Domini 1629-30, Sir John Harvey, Knight and Governor, presiding.’ Robins was not among burgesses for 1631/2, when the assembly, ‘accordinge to the former orders of the assembly the 5th of March 1628,’ established ‘mouthlie corts, and oftener upon extraordinarie causes in remote parts of this colony’ – including Accomack. The numbers of Eastern Shore men summoned to James City quarter courts and the hazards of crossing the bay led to increasing powers, both granted and assumed, for the Accomack court.

Court commissioners appointed for Accomack in 1631/2 were Capt. William Claybourne, Esq., Obedience Robins, gent., Capt. Thomas Grayes, John Howe, gent., Capt. Edmond Scarborough, Roger Saunders, gent., and Charles Harmar, gent.
The oath of office instructed:

Doe equall right, to the poore and to the riche after your cunninge, witt, and power, and after the lawes and customes of this colony, and as neere as may be after the lawes of the realme of England and statutes thereof made, you shall not be of counsell in any case or quarrell hanginge before you, and that you … shall not lett for guift, or other cause …

Commissioners determined suits to the value of five pounds sterling, petty offences, and ‘whatever a justice of the peace … may doe, such offences onlie excepted, as concerne the taking away of life or members:’ Parties retained the right of appeal to the governor and council at James City.

Records of the first courts held in Accomack are missing or illegible. Robins attended at least one court prior to 7th January 1632/3, the first for which the record survives, when he was listed third among five commissioners, after Grayes and Scarborough. ‘And the last shall be first,’ was a lesson lost on 17th-century Englishmen, for whom precedence and spatial arrangement were a primary concern. Relative position in listings of commissioners and signatory order indicate Robins’s increasing status and experience. Initially, he was not of the quorum, but by autumn of 1633 held the title ‘Commander of Accomack’ when he witnessed four writs of recognizance. The text of an earlier commanders’ commission for Elizabeth City specifies ‘men of sufficiency and experience … appoynted to command and governe the several plantations and inhabitants within the same, both for the better order of govern-ment and in the conservation of the peace … alse for the preventing and avoyding of such mischiefes as may happen unto us by the intrusions and practizes of the Indians our irreconcilable enemies.’ As few as three commissioners might hear suits, so long as at least one was a commander. From his appointment in 1631/2 until his death, Robins faithfully served the Accomack-Northampton monthly courts.

Three years in Virginia and 29 years old when he first represented the Eastern Shore in the General Assembly of March 1629/30, Robins also served in assemblies of 1641/2 and October 1644. On 5th July, 1634, ‘Capt wtm Clayborne being appointed Lieutenant for this shire did appoint and constitute Obedyence Robins gent. his deputy to perform all such services … to be done in that office … the Clarke … to send the said mr. Robins a commission for the authority of a Justice of Peace.’ A 1634 assembly divided the colony into eight shires, ‘which are to be governed as the shires in England … And Lieuten’ts, to be appointed the same as in England, and in a more especial manner to take care of the warr against Indians.’ As commissioner of the monthly court, Robins’s authority already encompassed ‘whatever a justice of peace … may doe.’

Robins’s comparative youth and health were factors in his increasing administrative duties. In August of 1633, Governor Sir John Harvey appointed four more commissioners ‘for that divers of the Commissioners of Accawmacke are deceased and gone from the plantation.’ The 30th December court opened with administration of the oath to William Stone, William Andrews, John Wilkins and William Burdett, who joined Clayborne, Edmund Scarborough and Robins on the bench. Stone, a future...
governor of Maryland, was the nephew of London merchant Thomas Stone. Andrews, who held four plantations, may have been a son of a Cambridge merchant. Burdett qualifies as a ‘self-made man.’ A servant in 1615, he became a commissioner, vestryman and burgess. Wilkins owned land adjoining Robins.

A variety of experience and social background came together to rule the county. The first extant list of commissioners for Accomack in 1631/2 begins with Claiborne, surveyor of the colony, secretary of state, and member of the governor’s


council. He may have had legal training in the Middle Temple, but his interests were commercial and centered on Kent Island. Thomas Grayes, or Graves, ‘ancient planter’ and gentleman, served as burgess for Smythe’s Hundred in 1619, and Accomack in 1629/30. John Howe’s titles also include burgess and commander. Scarborough was a younger son of an armigerous Norfolk family. Roger Sanders, originally a mariner, acquired with land and servants the designation ‘gentleman.’ Charles Harmer’s family included clerics and scholars at Oxford and Winchester, but he began his career on the Eastern Shore managing Lady Dale’s plantation. Accidental associations intensified through time; men extended their civil powers, forged business relations, and saw their children intermarry. Among the group, Robins was of ‘middling’ origins. Attendance to duty and longevity were important elements in Robins’s career of public service, despite an unexplained 14-month absence in 1637 and 1638. By 1640, of the commissioners appointed in 1632, only Claiborne and Robins were still alive, and Claiborne’s interests lay elsewhere.

When Robins resumed commissioner’s duties in the spring of 1638, he found marked changes. Nathaniel Littleton’s name first appears among Eastern Shore commissioners 1st May 1637, the date on which Obedience Robins’s long absence began. Before the ascendance of Littleton and, later, Argoll Yardley, court leadership was divided, but precedence is readily discerned. From May 1636, until September 1645, Robins missed approximately 14 of 81 recorded courts. Between 7th January 1632/3 and 27th March 1637, Robins led 13 of 29 courts. Claiborne, Graves, and Scarborough, all of whom took precedence over Robins, also led courts. Claiborne headed the list of commissioners when he was present, six times in four years. Graves led eight times; Scarborough, dead by 1635, twice. Robins headed the list only in the absence of all of these three. In turn, Robins took precedence over Howe, Sanders, Stone, Burdett, Andrews and Wilkins, and even Harmer, in his single appearance. Robins began as ‘mr Obedience Robins’ listed third, at the first recorded court meeting. He became ‘Obedyence Robins gent’ at the following meeting, and remained ‘mr’ until 19th May 1634, when ‘mr Obedience Robins Commander’ headed the list. When ‘Capt. william Clayborn Esq,’ presided 5th July, Robins reverted to ‘mr.,’ although he retained the office of Commander of the County. Robins led courts of 7th July and 8th September 1634, using the title ‘Commander,’ but when he next led a court on 16th November 1635, he reverted to ‘Mr.’ Clerks observed rank and included titles in attendance lists, and individual signatures follow a predictable order.

Considering difficulties of travel, vagaries of weather, pressures of business, and seventeenth-century health, Robins and the majority of the commissioners compiled remarkable attendance records even as population growth and expanding settlement increased the work load and distances travelled. More commissioners met more frequently and for longer sessions, and in 1643 the Assembly extended commissioners’ powers, while limiting meetings to six per year. In 1644 the court met for nine days; in 1650 for 13, and in 1655 for 34. No man whose livelihood

16. Ibid., pp.xxvii-xxix.
17. Ibid., pp.xxxviii.
19. Ibid., pp.71, 91. The importance of titles, as well as order of listing, is indicated by instances of revision. August 1, 1637, the clerk replaced ‘mr.’ and ‘Lieutenant’ with ‘Captain,’ to preceed the names of Howe, Stone and Roper. Ibid., n.7, p. 81.
20. Commissioners’ names and/or dates were omitted entirely (rarely) or obliterated. Ames I, n.40, p.16; Hening I, pp.272-3; J. Perry, Formation of a Society on Virginia’s Eastern Shore, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1990, p.176.
22. Ames I, pp.1, 2, 15, 17, 28, 40.
23. Perry estimates a 250% increase between 1632 and 1635, and correlates meeting sites and commissioners’ residences with attendance, p.175.
24. Hening I, pp.272-3; Perry, p.176.
depended upon his own labours could afford to participate in colonial government at this level.

Attempts by the colonial administration to control settlement patterns in the interest of consolidating defences failed. Despite increased settlement, relations between English colonists and their ‘irreconcileable enemies’ remained peaceful on the Eastern Shore, which escaped the 1622 massacre. Accomack, initially considered a source for salt, became particularly attractive after 1622, despite shallow waters that hindered shipping. When trade, travel and personal interaction between the two groups were carefully regulated, Commander Robins’s military responsibilities brought him into contact with Indians, including an annual visit from Debedeavon, the ‘Laughing King.’ The assembly at James City sought to regulate trade, limit contact, and prevent Indian access to arms with a series of acts modified for Accomack. Act XXIX, by the February 1631/2 Assembly, orders:

That no person or persons shall dare to speake or parlie with any Indians either in the woods or in any plantation, yf he can possibly avoyd it by any means, but as soone as he can, to bringe them to the commander, or give the commander notice uppon penalty of a mounthes service for any free man offendinge and twenty stripes to any servant. But for the planters of the Easterne Shoare, the commanders are required to observe all good termes of unitie; but that they cause

26. As late as 1628 a court at James City ordered a Mr. Capps to locate sites ‘on the other side of the bay’ for accumulating salt by evaporation. Minutes of the General Court, VMHB 30(1), 1922, p.52.
27. Ames II, n.10, p.34.
the planters to stand upon their guard, and not to suffer the Indians especially the Mottawombes to make any ordinarie resort or abode in their houses, and ye any English without leave resort unto their townes, the commanders to bynd them over to the next quarter cort.29

Presumably, Robins regularly entertained Debedeavon ‘to observe all good termes of unitie,’ but incidents threatened even the long-standing Eastern Shore truce. In 1635, the Laughing King sent emissaries with compensation for the deaths of Englishmen. Robins’s 5th September 1636 deposition at the Accomack Court is a rare statement in his own words:

At this court mr. Obedyence Robins aged 35th or ther abouts sworne and examined sayeth that about a yeere sithence certine Indyans [came to the house of] Daniell Cugly from the laughing kinge with a message [and brought a parcell of] Roanoke, at which tyme, the said Cugley sent for me, and [William] Brooks, to interpret their message, which message, as then I [understood], was that they had brought, the forsayd Roanoke for some [poo]r Englishman that had been kyld, how and wher I could not tell, neither could the Interpreter understand them, but that it was for some man, or other that was kyld I well understood, and therfor said that for all the world I would not receive it, and so departed and went to my house, notwithstanding this the said Daniell Cugley not only received the said Roanoke, at that tyme, and a day or two after told me, that the Indyans stole away and left the said Roanoke, but after I had charged him to send it back to them againe, hath impyously kept the same, and further since a rumor hath beene that, that the Indyans have obraded our boats, that they were the men, that kild the man and the chyld at the Ile of kent, and that they had payd for it to me and divers have complayned to me and of me for it I charged the said Cugley, that the said Roanoke should be forth cominge at all demands, he confessing he had the same in his custody, notwithstanding this being the fifth of this instant mounth, I charged the said Cugley to be present at the court and to bringe the said Roanoke with him, which he promised to doe, he hath contemned the command, and falsified his promise, this is all.

OBEYENCE ROBINS30

Robins could not accept payment for English lives, nor could he ignore rumours that he had done so. Cugley complied with Act XXIX when he notified Robins, but in retaining the roanoke, he offended the English sense of propriety.31 Acts X and XI of August 1633 reiterated bans on selling or trading arms and ammunition to the Indians, and banned sales of cloth, temporarily in short supply.32 Redemption of Robins’s reputation was the primary purpose behind Cugley’s arrest; Kent Island dead were catalysts and cultural differences the cause of misunderstanding, but a year later these factors were incidental. Testimony emphasizes Robins’s unconditional refusal of the roanoke. The court ordered Cugley to deliver all the Indians’ roanoke and other ‘truck’ to Robins and to offer surety or remain prisoner to answer at the next quarter court.33

Only two months later Robins exacted retribution upon William Croop for ‘approbius words.’ Witnesses agreed that on board a vessel, Croop accused Robins of writing a lie. ‘Quoth mr. Robins, I writ nothing, but that I will prove; quoth mr. Croope it is a ly, and said he would prove himselfe an honester man than he, quoth mr. Robins pray god it may prove soe, quoth mr. Croope, you kepe a house not fitt to give

29. Ibid., p.167.
30. Ames I, p.57. Words and letters in brackets were illegible or missing in the original, but are supplied from context or a nineteenth-century transcription. Ames II, pxviii.
32. Hening I, pp.219, 142.
any man intertaynment and said that he would speake his pleasure in that place. The court ordered that Croope should ‘ly necke and heales halfe-an houre [and] acknowledge his fault.’

Seventeenth-century planters depended on credit, and credit upon reputation. Robins’s elective and appointive offices depended on his ‘good conversation,’ a requirement occasionally enforced by disqualification.

Croope’s second insult, deprecating the commissioneer’s hospitality, effectively questioned Robins’s claim to gentle status.

Authority required respect, or failed. Robins spoke for longtime neighbour, sometime business partner and fellow commissioner John Wilkins, stating he never heard of any ill-carriage, whereas Melling, Dennis and Pasco ‘lived very basely and suspiciously.’

The value of Robins’s support lay in the strength of his own reputation. Particularly in cases of morality and slander, public retraction and example were essential elements in punishment, and public sites and times were clearly specified for exaction. The court ordered Thomas Dewey and James Davis, for disordering and abusing themselves upon the Sabbath, to ‘sitt by the heeles in the stockes the next Sabboth followeing in tyme of devyne service, and also to pay 30 pounds of tobacco per peece towards public uses.’

Robins could not ignore attacks on his standing within the community and his authority as a public figure. He used the courts to force retractions of slander through-

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34. Ibid., pp.59-60.
35. Hening I, p.111; II, p.412, 73.
37. Ibid., 129.
out his career.

Exploitation of Virginia opportunities required health and financial resources. A third essential element proved to be interpersonal networks. Crafted from common interests, favours, and extended kinship, and sustained despite the uncertainties of seventeenth-century communications, these networks served business and private ends. When Obedience Robins married widow Grace Neale Waters sometime after 1630, he acquired stepchildren and connections to colonists John Neale of Elizabeth City and Accomack and James Neale of St. Clement’s Manor, Maryland, a grandson of John Neale of Wollaston. Within the decade, members of his own family joined him on the Eastern Shore, but through marriage, Robins was immediately linked to an armigerous Northamptonshire family that included merchants and landowners.

Grace Neale married two colonists of varying experience but similar approaches to economic survival and social standing. Both Edward Waters and Robins were vestrymen, court commissioners, burgesses, militia leaders and planters, and represented contemporaries in legal matters. Robins acted as commercial agent for Dutch merchant Aries Topp and London merchant Thomas Crowdie, and Waters played an active role in the marketing of his own tobacco. John Neale represented Grace Neale Waters’s natal family in Virginia, and held positions comparable to those of her husbands. He was a vestryman, commissioner, burgess, planter, merchant, and active litigant. This consistency of connection suggests that Grace Neale, like Obedience Robins, disembarked in Virginia with some advantages. Other families who termed Robins ‘brother,’ but whose precise relationships are not established, include Pettits, Puddingtons and Floods. Robins and his kin demonstrate family influence on migration.

If Robins was ‘one of the colony’s leading nonconformists,’ his actions were contradictory. The first recorded business in the Accomack County Court Records addresses delinquent tithes in 1632. The following year, minister William Cotton complained that church wardens had not levied or collected tobacco and corn from parishioners. Shortages in ministers’ levies were taken ‘by distresse out of the churchwardens goods and chattells.’ In their defence, John Major testified that Mr. Robins three times refused to sign warrants for tithes. Walter Scott, provost marshall, added that he ‘brought such warrant to mr Robins to signe, and he tore the same.’ The court, which did not include Robins, ordered warrants for twice the quantities from defaulters, according to acts of the assembly. Robins was not rebuked, nor were defaulters named.

A church building existed in Accomack by 1623, and needed repairs in 1634. No vestry existed until 14th September 1635, when Cotton presented an order from James City for a parsonage. Traditionally, this undertaking was the responsibility of a vestry, which was appointed that day. The commissioners present, Graves, Robins, Howe, Andrews and Wilkins named themselves, Cotton, and six others for a total of 12. At the first vestry meeting, 29th September, nine vestrymen, including Robins, recorded specifications for a parsonage to be ‘built upon the gleeb land by Christyde next.’ Robins was not alone in his objection to tithing, but the church wardens

38. Grace Neale is sometimes identified as Grace O’Neill. Given correspondence from ‘cousins’ Neale, Neale is the name used here.
41. J. Horn, Adapting to a New World, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1994, p.56.
42. Ames I, pp.1, 10-11.
Robins's objection to tithing may validate the label 'nonconformist,' or reflect personal animosities, but he was no separatist. He was pragmatic, maintaining secular and religious positions within the ruling order. Tradition, members of English 'select' or 'close' vestries came from the 'masters,' 'gentlemen,' or 'better and ancienster sort of the parish,' and held office for life. When Robins tore warrants for tithes, and repeatedly refused to sign them, he may have been secure in knowledge of his fellow commissioners' sympathies. One legal scholar suggests that conflicts among Eastern Shore ministers and parishioners resulted from varying degrees of puritanism, rather than puritan against Anglican. Conflict could be based on personalities, rather than principles. In 1633 witnesses testified that Henry Charelton threatened, 'If he had mr Cotton without the Church yard he would have kickt him over the Pallyzados caling of him black cotted raskoll.' A decade later, Cotton's successors chose Robins, Littleton, Neale and Gookin to arbitrate a division of tithes.

Commissioners attended monthly sessions, oversaw and witnessed wills, certified sales, drew up warrants and provided character recommendations and recognizances. Robins took depositions out of court, singly and with other commissioners. In January 1635/6, the court required him to 'take the oth of Richard Nuton which now lyeth sick at Mr. Charles Harmers house and not able to come to the court in the behalf of William Blower against John Symons as concerning his dog killing a Cow.' In court, 17th May 1641, Robins testified to events of 1633-34: 'fynding in his judgment being then Commander of the sayd County, that the business was fowle, whereupon this deponent drew a Warrant with his owne hande for the apprehending of the three partyes.' Governor Francis Wyatt ordered commissioners to hear tobacco shippers' oaths specifying the quality of tobacco, and 'diligently and exactly view from house to house and examine by oath and all Lawfull means what old Tobacco there is remaining in the Custodye of any person.' Commissioners were to limit planting and burn excess, efforts towards 'advancing the price of tobacco by Regulation.' Honourary but onerous public duties extended beyond court days.

Robins represented others at court. He guaranteed payment by Rowland Williams of two barrels of corn to William Bibby, in 1633. Five years later, he signed a formal recognizance with John Neale for the latter's appearance at James City Court. Robins and Mr. Major arbitrated between Drew and Mountney. In the early 1640s, Robins acted for Mrs. Hanser, Ambrose Bennett, and Phillip Farrant, and successfully defended Richard Land in a suit brought by the attourney of Anne Littleton. On 2nd September 1643, the court clerk recorded: 'Aries Top, Merchaunt of the Good Shipp Sancta Marie of Amsterdam ... in my place and stand have put my welbeloved Freind Obedience Robins ... gentleman to bee my true and lawfull Attourney.'

Robins effectively used the courts to further his private interests. Sums were commonly computed in Virginia 'currency,' primarily pounds of 'good and merchantable tobacco,' but often barrels of corn. In January and February 1634/5, the court awarded Robins 24 pounds of tobacco from John Dennis and 500 pounds from William

47. Ames I, p.28. 'Self-made men were always cool towards a centralized church and the pretensions of clerics and they were hostile to interference in their affairs by enthusiasts of any religious persuasion.' Richard Grassby, The Business Community of Seventeenth-Century England, Cambridge, England, 1995, p.281.
49. Ibid., pp.76–7.
Berriman. Since Anthony Wills owed Berriman 1,150 pounds, Robins’s 500 pounds was attached from Wills’s debt. A year later, three suits netted 80, 92, and 160 pounds of tobacco. In January 1636/7 Robins successfully brought four suits for 300, 581, 100, and 1,046 pounds of tobacco.\(^52\)

Robins rarely lost. Fellow commissioners and the poorest labourers paid. A difference over 6½ bushels of corn led to a suit against commissioner Charlton at James City Quarter Court. Robins entered actions against Yardley for 3,000 pounds of tobacco and James Perreen for 40s sterl. Richard Jacobs paid a debt of £4 4s 6d and one hogshhead of ‘good and well Conditioned tobacco well and sufficiently pack’d for the payment … unto the Assignees of Mr. Obedience Robins in England,’ with shipping and court costs. Robins collected 700 pounds of tobacco from commissioner Stone, and 1,631 pounds of tobacco and 8s 6d from Florington Payne, Samuel Lucas, and Samuel Powell. For Powell, 825 pounds of tobacco was the price of freedom, to be paid ‘within six days or else to remayne a servant as formerly he was.’ Masters commonly hired out servants, and Robins sued to collect ‘one and Forty shillings sterl monie … for the use of Thomas Dewin.’ Nicholas Hall testified that ‘hee heard Esawe Butterfield saye on his death bed all his money he had given unto Mr Obediens Robins and all his clothes to Robert Merritt.’ Hall, Butterfield and Merritt had been transported at Robins’s expense. When John Andrews died at the ‘Dutch plantation,’ estate administrator Robins claimed to be the sole heir. Farmar Jones testified that ‘Mrs. Reynebourd came to her husband a little before [his] death desiringe to knowe what he would give her for hermaintenance hee answered that he had no thinge to dispose of, For the estate [was] all Mr. Robins, and until hee was satisfied, the said Mr. Reynebard could give her no thinge.’\(^53\)

The cumulative history of Robins’s transactions conveys the impression of an exacting opponent, whose approach to finance minimized risk and the necessity for court resolutions.

Robins’s duties as administrator for his brother’s estate added to his courtroom activity after 1641. When a former servant sued Obedience for the early release agreed upon by Edward Robins and Elizabeth Charlton at Plymouth, a jury found the agreement never legally incorporated into John Coleman’s indenture. In July 1645, a jury found ‘that Edward Robins, deceased, agreed to give Henry Boston one year of his time.’ Robins paid court costs, ‘three barrells of Corne and Cloathes according to the custome of the Countrey’ Robins probably outfitted another freed servant when, as Mr. Stafford’s surety, he was ordered to pay Andrew Bashawe ‘on Shuit of clothes, on pare shoes on pare of stockins and one shert.’\(^54\)

Robins was primarily a creditor. In a 1644 exception, ‘William Shrimpton of White Church … surviving Executor of the last Will and Testament of Dame Elizabeth Dale Widdow deceased, the Relict of Sir Thomas Dale Knight deceased,’ lists Robins, Littleton and Yardley among others for ‘All such Somme and Sommes of money as they and every or any of them doe owe,’ Yardley and Littleton acknowledged debts to the estate dating to the dispersal of Lady Dale’s cattle, but Robins’s indebtedness is not specified. Robins owed the estate of Daniel Cugley 110 pounds tobacco for two hogs, two hen turkeys and a cock, a goose and a gander. This debt is included in an account following an ‘outcry,’ or auction, and there is no suggestion that Robins was delinquent in payment. Through 1645, the court never resorted to awarding ‘execution,’ or the seizure of property to satisfy a creditor, against Robins. Even when ‘a steere goeing amongst the cattle of Mr. Robins and belonginge to Mr. Barnaby’ bore the ‘marke

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53. Ibid., p.103; Ames II, pp.255, 204-5;133; 137-8, 141; 54; Marshall, p.33; Ames I, p.95.
54. Ames II, pp.85-6, 90-1, 140-1, 260-2, 288-9, 453; 228-9; 432, 453; Ames I:18; 148, 16.
of Mr. Robins cattle,' the court ordered the animal returned to Barnaby, 'hee payeinge unto Mr. Robins for the keepinge thereof.'

Suits brought, decisions rendered and agreements recorded offer glimpses of the multiple enterprises which supported a colonial household. Robins and Wilkins contracted with Anthony Linny to 'build sett upp and finish a Wyndemill within the County of Accomack for their use,' agreeing to pay Linny £220 and 20 barrels of Indian corn, and to provide all necessary iron. Linny received an advance of £100 and, 'in regard of Martallity sake,' pledged his 'whole Estate and goods moveable and immoveable.'

There are no other references to Eastern Shore windmills before 1645, and no doubt Robins and Wilkins expected generous returns on their investment. Unfortunately, 'martallity' proved a factor, and Linny never finished the windmill. He signed the contract 1st March 1641/2, but by 9th May, the court recorded the 'thestate of Anthony Linny Millwright deceased doth stand engaged unto Henry Waldron doctor of Physick ... in consideracon of Physick Administered ... the visitation of his last illness.' Robins and Wilkins assumed administration, produced an inventory, paid debts to Mrs. Claiborne and Capt. William Hawley, and perhaps recouped losses with the acquisition of Linny's four servants and tools.

Eastern Shore communication and trade depended on boats. Ketches, canoes, shallops and pinnaces transported men and goods along creeks and across the Chesapeake. Stone, Howe, and Claiborne owned pinnaces. Marylanders made off with Claiborne's Longtayle and her crew, and Howe's Beardless John was newly built when he died. John Neale sold a 'pinnas' to Littleton and Burdick. Robins owned boats. In February 1643/4, the court ordered William Stevens to 'deliver the said shallop of 26 foote by the Keele with Masts oars and yards correspondent,' which were 'longe since' overdue, to the 'detriment and dammage' of Mr. Robins. A year later, the court appointed arbiters to 'end and determyne of all differences' between Robins and Stevens 'concerning work-manshipp of Boates.'

Robins owned the Accomack in 1648, although no owner was named when Ambrose Dixon and 'some others' successfully brought suit 'for thier service and Labour done and performed [on board the] Pinnace called the Accomack' in 1640.

Robins's riparian properties on Cherrystone Creek offered transportation and access to trade, and are recorded in court certifications of headrights and in patent books. A May 1639 court certified that nine people 'were transported at the proper Cost etc. of Mr. Obedience Robins.' Patent applications followed transportation at irregular intervals, and many reiterate earlier claims or present cumulative lists of persons whose passages were subsidized. In January 1640/1, the court certified Robins's right to 2,000 acres for transporting 40 persons. A patent for 450 acres, recorded on 22nd March 1643/4 in Robins's name, lists nine persons, at least two of whom, Coleman and Boston, were servants of the deceased Edward Robins. Robins held three parcels of 100, 100, and 200 acres under patents granted to William Williams in 1622, Clement Delk in 1627, and John Howe in 1637, for a total yearly rent of 7s. Howe's patent for 200 acres was dated December 1637, and by 2nd January 1637/8, he was dead. Robins bought the first two parcels, and 'since possessed' the last, after the death or relocation of the original owners. These 400 acres increase Robins's total acreage from the generally acknowledged 4,450 acres to 4,850 acres.

57. Ibid., pp.167-8; 181, 210, 244.
60. Ibid., pp.306, 16.
61. Ibid., pp.54-5.
recorded in April 1661, lists 30 persons for 1,500 acres, at 'the south side of Anancock,' 30 miles north of his original patent on Cherrystone Creek.63

Robins owned cattle and grew tobacco; he had a house and a storehouse on the shore, and boats, but the multiple uses to which he necessarily put his land can only be estimated. In May 1643, Robins leased 20 acres to boatwright William Stephens for five years. The terms indicate Robins's ideas of husbandry. Stephens had the right to 'sell and use all such Timber' he might use in his trade. The lease specified that Stephens would make annual payments of 'one hundred pounds of tobacco and Fower Capons att the nativity of our Lord god and two dayes worke in Harvest.' Further, he promised 'to Fence in all his Plantable ground to plant tenn Peere trees tenn Apple trees Tenn Cherry trees tenn peach trees (the said Mr. Robins Findeing him stocks.)' Stephens was to leave 'all the Houseing tennantable.' Land was cheap; labour expensive. Emphasis lies in physical improvements accruing to the ultimate benefit of the landowner himself, rather than in the rent.64

Tradition credits Obedience Robins with the influence to rename Accomack for his English home. Act XIII of the Assembly of March 1642/3, 'enacted and confirmed that the plantation and county now known by the name of Achommack shall be known and called by the county of North'ton.' The change of name had already been effected when Phillip Taylor and Edmond Scarborough represented Northampton in that Assembly. The preceeding June, Governor Berkeley commissioned the monthly court at Northampton, granting Commander Yardley and ten commissioners, any four of whom 'whereof Argoll Y eardley , Mr. Obedience Robins and Capt. William Stone too bee alwayes one,' authority to hear suits. It was also in March 1641/2, that Accomack elected John Neale and Robins to the Assembly. Hening does not list burgesses or include Assembly proceedings for 1641/2, but the action to Anglicize Accomack's name must have originated during Robins's and Neale's tenure in that session. Of seven sitting Accomack court commissioners, at least three, Robins, Neale, and Stone, had Northamptonshire antecedents. Robins demonstrated nostalgia for Northamptonshire when he called a plantation 'Buckby' and the change from Accomack to Northampton must have pleased him, but it is likely that he, Neale and Stone together influenced that choice.65

By mid-century, Obedience Robins was a leader in Eastern Shore politics, a substantial landowner, planter and entre-preneur, and a force to be reckoned with in colonial courtrooms. Robins consistently supported authority, and maintained a presence within the framework of colonial institutions. His business activities, preserved in public records, portray an individual of precise habit and ordered affairs. His contracts are specific. In an era and economy that depended upon credit and barter, Robins avoided debt and expected others to fulfill their obligations promptly.

Robinses of Long Buckby had experienced decades of prosperity that increased land holdings, social status and expectations. Obedience Robins brought these expectations to Virginia. In the process of establishing a familiar, deferential society, each English émigré struggled to place himself in an advantageous position. Obedience Robins's strategic combination of agriculture, public office and trade places him among tidewater progenitors of an enduring social and economic structure.

64. Ames II, pp.272-3; 48-9.
In 1993, I wrote an article to mark the 250th anniversary of the foundation of the Northampton Philosophical Society.\(^1\) Since then, additional evidence has come to light, although the society’s own papers remain missing, presumed lost, and no new members have been identified. Nothing has emerged that radically revises our knowledge of the society, but a number of new findings add considerably to the detail and are presented here as a postscript.

**Uranographia Britannica**

The following advertisement was placed in the *Northampton Mercury* of 11th April 1748:\(^2\)

> **URANOGRAPHIA BRITANNICA**  
> BEING an exact Survey of the Heavens, on fifty large Copper-Plates; wherein are represented, in their Places to the present Time, all the fix’d Stars, which have hitherto been observed in any Part of the World, with their proper Asterisms or Images, each accompanied by an explanatory Index, containing both the ancient and modern Catalogue, and curious Remarks pertinent thereto. At the End will be added two Hemispheres, with Ptolemy’s Stars; and to the Whole will be prefixed an Introduction, containing an Historical Account of the Asterisms, and the whole Astronomy of the Fix’d Stars from the earliest Antiquity to the present Time. This will be followed by a general Alphabetical Index of all the Stars in the whole *Uranographia*. Proposals, and the Plan at large, may be had gratis at Mr. Professor Bliss’s in Oxford, the Rev. Dr. Hooper’s at Trinity College in Cambridge, Mr. Thomas Yeoman’s in Northampton, and at the Undertaker’s own House in Leadenhall-street, London; at all which Places most of the Copper-Plate Prints may be inspected. N. B. The newest and most curious Experiments in ELECTRICITY will be exhibited, during the present Week, at Mr Yeoman’s Experiment Room in Gold-street, Northampton.

The announcement appeared only once and, after the passage of more than 250 years, its significance would probably be lost on the casual reader today. These few lines, however, reveal a hitherto unsuspected local connection with one of the more remarkable achievements in 18th-century astronomy. The said undertaker was John Neale, horologist, instrument maker, inventor and would-be publisher, and the author of the proposed celestial atlas, who receives no mention, was the astronomer John Bevis. Their ultimately unsuccessful publishing venture is one of the least known and most melancholy episodes in the history of astronomy.

Neale was the son of John Neale, a pinnaker of Abington Street, Northampton; he was apprenticed in 1730 to Jonathan Houlliere of Broad Street, London, watchmaker and member of the Skinners’ Company. On completion of his apprenticeship, he was admitted a freeman and member of the company on 2nd May 1738, and set up in business as a clockmaker and globemaker in Leadenhall Street, London.\(^3\)
In 1744 he was granted a patent for a 'Quadrantial Planetarial Machine, by which the Altitude of any of the Planets or Fixed Starrs may be taken'.4 The following year he published a book of instruction, The Description of the Planetary Machine, and offered private lectures in 'the use of the Orrery and Globes'. In 1746, responding to the increasing demand for intellectual entertainment, he joined the growing ranks of philosophical lecturers, advertising hourly experiments throughout the day and lectures each evening at 8pm.5

By 1748, Thomas Yeoman had been resident in Northampton for five years and was employed as a millwright at Edward Cave's pioneering cotton-mill.6 But he also operated his own engineering business and had already diversified into other fields, particularly the construction of scientific instruments, and had briefly launched himself as an itinerant philosophical lecturer. He was an early member and subsequently president of the Northampton Philosophical Society, which met at his house, where he evidently continued to demonstrate electrical phenomena in his 'Experiment Room'. Some of these 'most curious Experiments' undoubtedly owed much to John Neale, recently the author of Directions for Gentlemen who Have Electrical Machines (1747), as previously advertised by Yeoman.7

Neale presumably entered into some sort of business arrangement with Thomas Yeoman in Northampton for, in April 1747, Yeoman advertised 'Mr Neal's Mensurator', a waywiser or milometer designed to be fixed to a carriage.8 The mensurator, 'a new Invented Machine for Land-Measure', was a simple odometer or revolution-counter worked by a carriage wheel and linked to a dial inside the vehicle. Several versions were described, together with an account of Neale's electrical experiments, in the Gentleman's Magazine the following month.9 In the same year, Neale took subscriptions for Noble and Butlin's new map of Northampton, which was advertised and sold locally by Thomas Yeoman.10

John Bevis is now something of a neglected figure in 18th-century astronomy, remembered more for failure and disappointment than for outstanding achievement and largely overshadowed by more illustrious contemporaries. Born at Old Sarum, Wiltshire, in 1695, he was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, where he studied medicine, taking his MA in 1718. He continued his medical studies in France and Italy before returning to England, to a successful career as a physician in London.11 However, his medical practice soon took second place to his astronomical interests and he must have begun regular observations almost immediately, making his first important discovery, the Crab Nebula, in 1731 (see below). He still holds the unique distinction of being the only person since the invention of the telescope to witness that rarest of celestial events, a planetary occultation, when, at about 9:50 on the evening of 28th May 1737, he observed the planet Venus eclipse Mercury, obscuring it for several minutes.12

Bevis was a diligent and prolific observer; he occasionally assisted the Astronomer Royal, Edmond Halley, and was a frequent collaborator of James Short and correspondent of James Bradley. The first of his many papers appeared in the Philosophical Transactions in 1737 and, the following year,

8. NM, 27 Apr 1747, 16/1.
10. NM, 30 Mar, 203/3; 31 Aug, 87/2 & 21 Sep 1747, 99/2.
11. Biographical details of Bevis are taken from R. Wallis, 'John Bevis, MD, FRS (1695-1771) astronomer loyal', Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London 36, 211-225 (1982); see also DNB.
he began a systematic programme of nightly observations at his newly-built observatory at Stoke Newington. This work was to form the basis of his projected celestial atlas.

The *Mercury* advertisement for *Uranographia Britannica* is the earliest known dated reference to the atlas, yet evidently the work was already well advanced as prints of the plates were available for inspection. Besides Thomas Yeoman, the other two agents named were Nathaniel Bliss, Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford and later Astronomer Royal, and Francis Hooper, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. At about the same time, Neale published formal proposals for the atlas and many subscribed; a second undated proposal was also issued with a list of subscribers appended. It comprised 181 names, including many of the most important contemporary astronomers, mathematicians, philosophers and instrument makers who, between them, subscribed for 249 copies. The atlas was priced at two guineas, but those subscribing for six copies would receive a seventh free. Among the subscribers were Bliss, Hooper and Yeoman and ‘Rev Phil. Doddridge, D.D. Master of the Academy at Northampton’. The second proposal also named more agents accepting subscriptions, seven in London and a further five throughout the country. One of these was Edward Cave, publisher of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, at St. John’s Gate, another with commercial interests in Northampton.

The genesis of Bevis’s *Uranographia Britannica* will probably always remain something of a mystery. The origin of the partnership between the two principals is not known; certainly they would have moved in the same circle of instrument makers, lecturers and philosophers and, in 1747, Neale’s *Directions for Gentlemen* included an appendix of six electrical experiments communicated by Bevis. However, a new celestial atlas was an entirely different undertaking and John Neale’s motive for embarking on such an ambitious enterprise, with very little previous experience of publishing, is not apparent. Equally, Bevis’s reasons for entrusting his work to such a relative novice are unfathomable. Prof. Ashworth has speculated, on the basis of the omission of Bevis’s name from the proposals and the preponderance of London instrument makers among the agents and subscribers, that Neale may have been acting as the leader of a consortium.

In any event, the exact chronology and details of the failure are far from clear. What cannot be doubted is the vast expense of producing a large volume of finely engraved maps; the proposals were emphatic on this point: ‘the Undertaker has spar’d no Expence to get the Plates as elegantly executed as possible ... the Whole shall be printed on a fine white Demy Writing Paper, made on purpose for this Work’. Despite the advanced state of the publication – all the plates were prepared – and the list of expectant subscribers, the venture collapsed in 1750. The assets, in the form of the engraved plates, were sequestered by the Court of Chancery and Neale was declared bankrupt. Although it was never properly

13. Predating the previously known instance by 8 months, see W. B. Ashworth, op. cit. footnote 20.
14. Nathaniel Bliss, FRS (1700–1764) succeeded Edmond Halley as the third Savilian Professor in 1742 and James Bradley as the fourth Astronomer Royal in 1762, serving the briefest and arguably the least celebrated incumbency in that illustrious office; DNB; L. S. Sutherland & L. G. Mitchell, *The History of the University of Oxford*, vol V *The Eighteenth Century* (1986). Francis Hooper, DD (1694/5–1763) became a Fellow of Trinity College in 1719; J. Venn & J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigiensis* (1922).
15. The first proposal is in the Bodleian Library, R. Wallis op. cit. footnote 11. Two copies of the second proposal are known to survive, both in the library of Glasgow University, Sp. Coll. f.465.

16. D. L. Bates, op. cit. footnote 6. Cave’s publishing interests were extensive; although best known as the proprietor of the *Gentleman’s Magazine* and the publisher of Samuel Johnson, he also published books on natural philosophy and mathematics, including Benjamin Franklin’s *Experiments and Observations in Electricity* (1751).
17. Neale had published his own works privately. Bevis certainly knew Edward Cave, a highly successful publisher, footnote 16.
published, fortunately for historians of astronomy and for Bevis’s posthumous reputation, the work has survived intact as a number of complete copies of proof plates. As an abortive publication, *Uranographia Britannica* has always been something of a bibliographical anomaly, a ‘ghost book,’ and for many years it remained neglected or misinterpreted. It was not until Prof. Ashworth’s definitive study that its full significance was finally appreciated.

In the form that survives, Bevis’s great work is a magnificent example of the celestial cartographer’s art. As promised in the proposals, it comprised 51 plates: 48 charts of the Ptolemaic constellations, one of the constellations of the southern hemisphere and two planispheres of the Ptolemaic constellations. The printed area of each chart, including the dedication, measures 375 x 312 mm, and each constellation is accompanied by an explanatory table; the tables have survived in fewer copies than the plates. Prof. Ashworth has concluded that the atlas is based on the 1725 catalogue of John Flamsteed, augmented by Bevis’s own observations, a total of 3,551 stars in the catalogue, reduced to the epoch 1746. The individual plates are finely executed, the design and layout closely following the precedent of Bayer’s *Urano-metria* of 1603. Had it been published, *Uranographia Britannica* would have been the natural successor to Flamsteed’s own *Atlas Coelestis* (1729).

All of the plates carry dedications and two of them are dedicated to the Northampton Philosophical Society. Plate XXII, Aries, is dedicated to the society itself (Figure 1) and the adjacent Plate XXIII, Taurus, to its president, Philip Doddridge (Figure 2). In general, there appears to be no rationale for the association of the 51 plates of *Uranographia* with their respective dedications; there is, however, one example of an obvious if whimsical connection between subject and dedicatee. The constellation Triangulum (plate XXI) is represented by a geometer’s drawing instrument, a triangle, and the dedicatee is Nathaniel Bliss, Savilian Professor of Geometry at Oxford; perhaps more subtle allusions are also to be found in the atlas. If the dedication of the plates was largely a matter of chance, it was certainly a fortuitous coincidence that Doddridge’s Taurus plate should be one of the most important plates in the entire atlas in terms of its astronomical significance. Not only is the Taurus plate one of the boldest and most attractive compositions but, more importantly, it depicts one or possibly two newly-discovered objects. Towards the tip of the bull’s right (southern) horn is the famous Crab Nebula, a supernova remnant, first observed by Bevis and credited to him as the first in Charles Messier’s 1781 catalogue of nebulous objects, M1. The second is a faint object, no longer visible in the position indicated, that has recently been proposed as an early ‘prediscovery’ observation by John Flamsteed of the planet Uranus. Remarkably, Bevis possibly made his own independent prediscovery observation of Uranus in 1738; it is depicted on the Sagittarius plate of *Uranographia*. If this conjecture is correct, it would be yet a further irony of Bevis’s career that the honour of discovering the first new planet of the modern era eluded him; it was not until 1781 that William Herschel eventually recognized and named the newly-discovered planet.

The unfortunate experience with *Uranographia Britannica* and his subsequent bankruptcy evidently did little to discourage John Neale and he remained in London in business as an instrument maker. Dr. Clifton’s *Directory of British Scientific Instrument Makers* records a total of 11 apprentices trained by him, 8 of these after the events of 1750. His association with Thomas Yeoman continued, as one of these apprentices was Yeoman’s own son, James. He also continued to lecture, offering to ‘attend any Select Company of Gentlemen or Ladies, or private Families … from 6 to 8 in an Evening’ to explain the use of his globes. In 1755, he was briefly linked with the young James Watt who was tutored in the construction of scientific instruments in


24. James Yeoman was apprenticed to Neale on 7 Nov 1752. He completed his term and was admitted to the Skinners’ Company on 5 Feb 1760, Skinners’ Company Records, op. cit. footnote 3.

Neale’s workshop. John Marr, who accompanied Watt during his first visit to London, described John Neale as ‘the frankest tradesman of any of the fraternity I have seen’. Neale’s career after this point is entirely obscure but he clearly continued to suffer financial problems and was declared bankrupt yet again in 1758. Nothing is known of John Neale subsequently.

Following the shambles of *Uranographia Britannica*, Bevis was deeply troubled by the disenchantment of some of his subscribers and their insinuations of incompetence or even malpractice. He nevertheless resumed his astronomical work and continued to publish his observations; these included the lunar eclipse of December 1750, transits of Mercury and Venus and the return of Halley’s comet in May 1759. He endured further personal disappointment when he failed to secure the post of Astronomer Royal on the death of Nathaniel Bliss in 1764. Although his work for *Uranographia Britannica* had brought him recognition from overseas (he was elected a member of the Berlin Academy of Sciences in 1750), honour came belatedly in his own country when he was eventually elected to a fellowship of the Royal Society in 1765. He died on 6th November 1771, reputedly as the result of a fall from his telescope.

Long after the demise of its creator, *Uranographia Britannica* has recently enjoyed something of a revival in fortunes and Bevis’s standing has risen accordingly. Following the work of Mrs. Wallis, Prof. Ashworth and others, the atlas has rightly been instated among the great works of celestial cartography. Approximately 16 copies, in various states of completeness, are now known; five copies originally in the collection of the astronomer John Couch Adams are at the University of Cambridge, and another complete copy was recently discovered to great acclaim in the library of the Manchester Astronomical Society. Thanks to modern digital technology, *Uranographia Britannica* is now available on CD-ROM.

Sir Arthur Hesilrige

The proposals for *Uranographia* included a statement of John Neale’s intention to ‘honour his Work, by inscribing each Plate to some Society, or particular person among his Subscribers, eminent for encouraging Sciences; on which Account no additional Expence will be exacted’. Only four institutions were so distinguished: the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the Royal Society of London and the Philosophical Society of Northampton. The individual dedicatees include many of the greatest names of mid 18th-century science and society: James Bradley, Astronomer Royal; Martin Folkes, President of the Royal Society; Admiral Lord Anson; Augusta, Princess of Wales; William Stukeley and, in his capacity as President of the Northampton Philosophical Society, Philip Doddridge.

It may seem remarkable to find a modest provincial club such as the Northampton Philosophical Society ranked alongside the two universities and the Royal Society; however, it seems highly unlikely that this unusual honour should be construed as a true indication of the standing of the society. More probably, it happened because of the working association between Thomas Yeoman and John Neale, although it may well indicate that, c.1750, the Northampton


27. *GM*, Sep 1758, 453. A John Neale was still resident in Abington Street, Northampton, in the 1768 poll, Northamptonshire Record Office Map 1114, hereafter NRO.


32. A complete list of the dedicatees is given in R. Wallis, op. cit. footnote 11.
Figure 2: Plate XXIII, Taurus, from *Uranographia Britannica*

The dedication is to the Reverend Philip Doddridge D.D., President of the Philosophical Society at Northampton. Original dimensions 375 x 312 mm. Reproduced, by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, from *Uranographia Britannica* (Adams.1.81.1)

Philosophical Society was the only provincial society of any note. Nevertheless, the Aries and Taurus plates raise some interesting issues in their dedications and in the accompanying heraldry. The Taurus plate, dedicated to Doddridge, bears his well known arms and family motto, *dum vivimus vivamus*, moreover it confirms Doddridge’s position as president of the society for a second time. In a letter to Thomas Yeoman, 10th April 1744, Stephen Hales addressed greetings to the society and Doddridge, its president, thus identifying him as the first holder of the office.³⁴

The Aries plate, however, is dedicated to the society itself, with a coat of arms bearing the motto, *naturae accedere partes*. An enquiry


to the College of Arms soon established that no grant of arms was ever made to the society, suggesting that the arms had probably been appropriated informally from a local armigerous family. Further investigation eventually identified the arms as those of the Hesilrige family. Sir Arthur Hesilrige has been recognized previously as a member of the society, although he was not one of the originals, nor was he mentioned in the contemporary account in the Gentleman’s Magazine. For this information, we are reliant on the correspondence of William Shipley, who, in a letter of 18th October 1747 to Henry Baker, informs Baker of his enthusiasm for the society, which he had recently joined, and in a list of members names ‘Sir Arthur Harsley’. Sir Arthur Hesilrige, 7th baronet (1704–1763), was the son of Sir Robert Hesilrige and succeeded to the baronetcy on the death of his father on 19th May 1721. His great-grandfather and namesake, the 2nd baronet, was one of the five MPs impeached by Charles I in 1642. In 1725, he married Hannah Sturges, reputedly the inspiration for Samuel Richardson’s eponymous heroine, Pamela. The Hesilrige family were, and still are, Lords of the Manor of Noseley, Leicestershire and it was Sir Arthur who was largely responsible for the remodelling of Noseley Hall in the late 1720s. The Hesilrige arms (argent, a chevron sable, between three hazel-leaves vert) bear the family motto, *pro aris et focis*, ‘for our altars and our homes’ (see Figure 3). Whether these arms were genuinely adopted and used by the society or whether they were merely a convenient contrivance for the purposes of the Aries plate is not apparent. Quite probably, the arms would also have been used for other purposes, perhaps as a book-plate to identify the society’s library (see below). In any event, the society replaced the family motto with one more appropriate to a body dedicated to the pursuit of natural philosophy: *naturae accedere partes*, ‘to reach the realms of nature’. The adoption of the family arms implies that Sir Arthur Hesilrige held some position of patronage within the society; most probably he was a past president. Although the family seat was at Noseley, the Hesilriges certainly wielded considerable influence in Northampton, owning an extensive tract of property covering the site of the castle ruins and the well-known Hazlerigg Mansion in Marefair, one of the few 17th-century buildings to survive the fire of 1675.

Sir Arthur was a typical 18th-century aristocrat. As a young man, he embarked on the Grand Tour, using the opportunity, as many did, to furnish his house with Italian art. He was a keen sportsman; the Mercury makes frequent mention of his successes as a breeder and racer of thoroughbreds. He also

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35. I am very grateful to Mr. N. J. Rogers of the Cambridge University Heraldic and Genealogical Society, and Archivist of Sidney Sussex College, for finally establishing this identity.


38. There are many spelling variants of the name, ‘Harsley’ being the most unusual. ‘Haslerig’ was the form used by Doddridge (G. F. Nuttall, *Calendar of the Correspondence of Philip Doddridge DD* (1702–1751), Northamptonshire Record Society vol. XXIX, 1979), but the more common ‘Hesilrige’ is used for consistency here. In 1818, the family formally adopted the spelling ‘Hazlerigg’.

39. *NM*, 29 May 1721, 55. There seems to be some doubt as to Hesilrige’s date of birth; no date is given in the Complete Baronetage, Dr. Nuttall gives 1704, op. cit. footnote 38. John Thornton gave 1708 (Doddridge Exhibition Catalogue, Northampton Museums, April 1980) but, as Hesilrige became High Sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1726, this seems improbable.

40. Sir Arthur Hesilrige, 2nd Bt, (d.1661) see *DNB*.


42. A. C. Fox-Davies, *Armorial Families* (1926).


44. NRO map 5967; *NM*, 16 Feb 1730, 171/1.

45. I am grateful to Lord Hazlerigg for this information.
held important local offices from an early age; he was successively High Sheriff (1726) and Deputy Lieutenant of Northamptonshire (1728) and Deputy Lieutenant of Leicestershire (1729).46 Later in life he became a Commissioner for the Navigation of the River Nene.47

When the first Masonic Lodge was founded in Northampton in 1730, it was the young Sir Arthur who was elected Master. The Mercury records: ‘Jan 17. Last Night a great Number of Free Masons were assembled at the George-Inn in this Town, when the said Inn was constituted a Lodge, of which Sir Arthur Hesilrige, Bt was chosen Master, in the presence of the Duke of Richmond, and several other Gentlemen of that ancient Fraternity’.48 The lodge, the St. George and Dragon, was eventually erased in 1754 and almost nothing is known about it. However, it was certainly still in existence in 1745, meeting on the first Saturday of the month.49 This raises the intriguing possibility that the Northampton Philosophical Society may have had other Masonic connections but, as the records of neither lodge nor society appear to survive, it is unlikely that this question will ever be resolved. Sir Arthur Hesilrige died in Northampton in 1763 and is buried in Noseley Chapel.50

Mr. John Poole and the transit of Mercury
At the time of my previous article, one of the founder members, a ‘Mr Poole’, could not be identified with certainty. However, a report on the transit of Mercury of 6th May 1753, published in the Gentleman’s Magazine, clearly identifies him as ‘Mr John Poole of the Philosophical Society at Northampton’, an accomplished amateur astronomer.51 By a neat coincidence, ‘Candidus’, the pseudonymous author of the piece, is believed to be John Bevis.52 The earlier account of the society in the same magazine refers to Mr. Poole’s meteorological records and his observations of the comet that exploded spectacularly across the sky in the early months of 1744.53 It was yet another disappointment of Bevis’s career that his observation of the same comet, the first in Britain, was nevertheless too late to give him priority. The comet has since been designated de Cheseaux’ comet after the Swiss astronomer, Jean-Phillippe Loÿs de Cheseaux, who was credited with an earlier sighting.54

In his lengthy account of the earthquake of 30th September 1750, Philip Doddridge referred to Poole in complimentary terms,
describing him as ‘remarkably curious, for a Man in His Sphere of Life’.\textsuperscript{55} John Poole was a turnpike keeper, an occupation that was probably ideally suited to meteorology and astronomical observation; his observation of the transit of Mercury was made at Hillmorton, Warwickshire.\textsuperscript{56} Transits of the inner planets, Mercury and Venus - when the planet crosses the disc of the sun - were important events in the 18th century, because accurate timing of the motion of the silhouetted planet allowed astronomers to calculate the relative distance of the earth and the planet from the sun. Thus, on the 6th May 1753, the most distinguished astronomers of the day trained their instruments on the sun to observe this comparatively rare celestial event. Those whose observations were recorded in the Gentleman's Magazine included John Smeaton, John Canton FRS, James Short FRS, and Bevis himself, all reporting from London.\textsuperscript{57} James Bradley, the Astronomer Royal, was frustrated by cloud that obscured his observations at the Royal Observatory in Greenwich. Other observations were reported from Leeds, Devon, the Royal Observatory in Paris, and Hillmorton. The account lists the time of the end of the transit as determined by each of 13 observers; all reported a time within 30 seconds of 10:12:00, when reduced to the common longitude of St. Paul’s cathedral. As Candidus observed, this was a remarkable achievement given the difficulty of synchronising measurements over large distances in the mid-18th century.

These observations of John Poole imply a considerable degree of skill and sophistication, and the compilation of the results of both amateur and professional observers attests to a remarkably egalitarian culture within 18th-century astronomy. A more detailed report of the transit also appeared in the Philosophical Transactions but, on that occasion, John Poole and his fellow amateurs were not acknowledged.\textsuperscript{58}

The account of the transit of Mercury extends the certain lifespan of the society to nearly ten years from its foundation in November 1743, but the date of and reasons for its eventual demise remain unknown. Whatever the ultimate fate of Northampton’s first formal scientific society, local interest in natural philosophy continued to be served by a variety of other means.

\textit{All Lovers of Astronomy}

Intellectual life in the provinces inevitably relied heavily on the printed word as the main repository of knowledge, on a network of correspondents to communicate information rapidly and on visiting lecturers to provide education, entertainment and spectacle. In keeping with other similar gentleman’s groups, the Northampton Philosophical Society would almost certainly have maintained a library for the use of the members, and quite probably would have identified its books with an appropriate bookplate. Unfortunately, no tangible evidence of such a library remains, although subscription lists provide some indication of the interests of the individual members. Philip Doddridge, Thomas Yeoman and others have been identified in the subscription lists of a variety of books including works of natural philosophy.\textsuperscript{59} The society itself, however, subscribed to only two known works: the ill-fated \textit{Uranographia}

\textsuperscript{55.} Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society \textit{46}, 712-721 (1750). Hereafter PTRS.
\textsuperscript{56.} Hillmorton stands about a mile beyond the county boundary, on the Northampton to Dunchurch turnpike, one of the county’s earliest; A. Cossons, ‘The turnpike roads of Northamptonshire with the Soke of Peterborough’, \textit{NP&P}, vol. I, no 3, 29-45 (1950). John Poole appears in the treasurer’s accounts for Hillmorton gate in 1753-4, but not in subsequent years, NRO ZA 2919.
\textsuperscript{57.} John Canton (1718-1772), master of an academy at Spitalfields, and James Short (1710-1768), optical instrument maker, were leading figures in the Royal Society, \textit{DNB}; both had been subscribers to \textit{Uranographia Britannica}, and Short was one of Neale’s agents. John Smeaton (1724-1792), elected FRS in March of the same year, was then an instrument maker but became better known as a civil engineer, A. W. Skempton, ed, \textit{John Smeaton FRS} (1981).
\textsuperscript{58.} PTRS 48, 192-200 (1753).
\textsuperscript{59.} The society itself, however, subscribed to only two known works: the ill-fated \textit{Uranographia}
As reported previously, the proceedings of the Northampton Philosophical Society were well known to the Royal Society through the correspondence of Philip Doddridge, William Shipley and Thomas Yeoman, and several accounts emanating from Northampton were reproduced in the Philosophical Transactions. Evidence of a network of correspondents may also be inferred from occasional letters that were reproduced in the Northampton Mercury. In January 1751, at the height of an epidemic of cattle distemper, the local newspaper reproduced a letter from Henry Baker, FRS, to Doddridge on the subject. In March of the same year, it published an extract of a letter from the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences, forwarded by John Nixon, FRS, on fluctuations in the earth’s magnetic field observed during auroral displays.

Itinerant lecturers advertised occasionally in the Mercury and, in the following decade, several of the most prominent visited the town during their provincial excursions. In January 1755, a Mr Griffis presented a course of lectures on experimental philosophy at the Hind. John Warltire offered a course of three lectures at the Dolphin Inn, Gold Street, in December 1763. He promised experiments on the orrery, air-pump, electric apparatus, microscope and telescope; unusually, he provided separate courses for ladies and gentlemen. The following year, the town was honoured with a visit by James Ferguson, prolific lecturer, author, instrument maker and respected Fellow of the Royal Society. For a subscription of one guinea, Ferguson delivered a course of 12 lectures at the Red Lion, covering an extensive range of ‘useful and interesting Subjects … experimentally demonstrated with a great Variety of simple Machines and compound Engines’. Meanwhile, the natural theatre of the heavens continued to provide spectacular celestial entertainment at no charge. The much anticipated return of Halley’s comet in 1759 prompted a steady stream of publications and comment in the press and afforded a perfect promotion for astronomical books and instruments. The transit of Venus on 6th June 1761 was also duly recorded. Thomas Harris, a surveyor of Bugbrooke, advertised publicly conducted observations in Northampton for ‘All Lovers of Astronomy’ and a detailed report appeared of the transit as seen from Maidwell ‘thro’ a very good Reflecting Telescope of 16 Inches 1-half long, made by Mr. Heath’. The continuing interest in astronomy naturally created a demand for astronomical instruments and, after Thomas Yeoman’s departure to London, others filled the void in the market. In 1765, Henry Duke,
cabinet-maker of Market Hill, Northampton, advertised, along with various items of domestic furniture, a ‘Double Microscope, made by T. Wright; Reflecting Telescope; a Refracting Ditto, a Camera-Obscura’.68

Long after the decline of the society, at least some of the former members maintained an active interest in natural philosophy. Charlewood Lawton, identified previously as a particularly active member, corresponded with John Arden; in a letter of 10th March 1764, from Beverley, Arden gave a lengthy description of an ‘electric orrery’ of his own invention. Arden, formerly a resident of Derby, was also a popular lecturer and later became one of the founding members of the Bath Philosophical Society (1779-1787), now probably best remembered for its association with the astronomer, William Herschel.69

The origins of the Northampton Philosophical Society were relatively humble and its aims fairly unambitious. In a letter to Henry Baker in 1747, Philip Doddridge wrote: ‘very little is to be expected of our Meetings more than the Amusement & Improvement of those who are learning their first Elements in Philosophy’.70 Even though the society appears to have survived for little more than a decade and left no direct institutional successors, it gained recognition far beyond its provincial limits and attained a degree of respectability to rank alongside the most eminent institutions and individuals of the mid-18th century. It certainly surpassed Doddridge’s modest aspirations.71

68. NM, 4 Mar 1765, 198/3. Probably Thomas Wright, instrument maker of Fleet Street, G. Clifton, op. cit. footnote 3.


71. I am very grateful to Prof. Bill Ashworth of the Dept. of History, University of Missouri, for kindly commenting on this article.
William Shipley, founder of the [R.]SA (The Society was granted the title ‘Royal’ in 1908), was thirty-two years of age when he settled in Northampton in 1747. He had recently resigned his post as a Gentleman Pensioner at Arms, being tired of Court routine and determined to follow his profession as an artist. What made him choose Northampton since his family and friends were in Hampshire and London cannot be said. Theobald tells us ‘he was fond of rural life’ and that ‘after being employed in several counties in painting perspective Views of Noblemen’s and Gentleman’s Seats, parks, etc he settled for about seven years in the Town of Northampton.’

Perhaps he had heard of Peter Tileman’s beautiful drawings of Northampton which had been commissioned for John Bridges’ history of the county, but which were never published, or of Thomas Jeffery’s illustrated plan of the town in a survey of 1746. As he told his friend Henry Baker in a series of letters he wrote from Northampton, there was much in the town and neighbourhood to interest a person devoted to the pursuit of natural knowledge. Writing to Shipley in 1748, Baker hoped he ‘was very happy in the country’ as the tenor of his informative correspondence seemed to imply.

What particularly attracted Shipley were the meetings of the Northampton Philosophical Society, the ‘Royal Society in miniature’ as he described it in one of his letters to Henry Baker. The Philosophical Society had been founded in 1743 by five Northampton worthies. Its rules were drawn up by Thomas Yeoman, engineer and manager of the cotton works, and it used Yeoman’s house as a meeting place. Yeoman was a close friend of the Rev. Philip Doddridge whom Shipley considered ‘the most curious’ of the Society’s members.

Shipley does not mention Yeoman by name in his correspondence with Henry Baker. It is likely that this public-spirited engineer did much to encourage Shipley in his own endeavours for the public good. The close working relationship between Yeoman and Stephen Hales, the eminent clergyman scientist, cannot have escaped Shipley’s notice, and he may well have made use of Yeoman’s name when, on Henry Baker’s advice, he applied to Dr. Hales regarding his scheme for a Society of Arts.

At what must have been amongst the earliest occasions when Shipley attended the Northampton Philosophical Society he ‘made a proposal for having a Prize Medal annually.’ This proposal was, as he told Henry Baker in a letter dated 18th October 1747 ‘to be put to the vote’ on 20th October. We


2. See B. Bailey and Thomas Jefferys, A Plan of the Town of Northampton, surveyed in MDCCLXXVI by Messrs Noble and Butlin, London 1747 (Reproduced by Northampton Public Libraries, 1975). I am indebted to Dr. David Bates for these references.
do not know the outcome of the vote but I have suggested that this was one of the 'many and public occasions' when Shipley took 'an opportunity of mentioning the good effects rewards had been productive of."

In May 1748 Shipley told Baker that he was now 'myself a member' of the Northampton Philosophical Society, and after that he had designed an improved barometer for their use and collected geological specimens for Baker. Baker was also glad to accept the specimens of animalcules which Shipley offered to send him. In January 1748/9 Baker wrote to Dr. Doddridge sending his compliments to the Northampton Philosophical Society 'and to Mr Shipley in particular and pray tell him I take it as a great favour, if he can send me some of the wheel animals'. These 'wheel animals' were 'Rotifera', a class of animalcule distinguished by the wheel-like motion of their head organs. Baker had shown how the microscope could be used to investigate the various categories of 'wheelers' as he sometimes called them. Doddridge told him that Shipley had 'some dry Mud on which there are eggs of Wheel Animals which he will send you with some other little things as soon as he conveniently can. He finds a pretty good encouragement here'.

The year 1750 was one of earthquakes in England. The newspapers carried sensational reports of the shocks, and some clergymen saw them as portents of Divine wrath. The scientists were interested in collecting precise information. On 8th February 'between 12 and 1 o'clock after noon', it was reported 'an earthquake was felt throughout London and Westminster'. Baker sent an account of it to Doddridge to be communicated to the Northampton Philosophical Society and also enquired 'if you at Northampton felt anything?' Doddridge replied that he was 'credibly informed that a Lady of this town, Sister to Mr Wilmer, our late representative in Parliament, and a Gentleman, son to Dr. Conant, a very celebrated Preacher of the Last age, both of them felt a strange shock just at the time it was felt in London. I am not acquainted with either of them, but I have the report from very good hands, and indeed Mr Shipley is my immediate author'.

The more violent shock which troubled London on 8th March seems to have left Northampton untouched, for Doddridge could not 'find that anything was felt there'. On 30th September, however, according to the newspapers and magazines, Northampton suffered under a shock of record proportions. Doddridge responded to Baker's request for information by sending an account which was so meticulously detailed that it was published in full in the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society. ‘Some’ he wrote, ‘thought the Quivering of the Ground continued longer than others apprehended but I have met with none, that in this respect were so accurate in their Observation, as my ingenious friend Mr Shipley, who assures me he felt four distinct concussions, the second and third of which were more violent than the first and last, all with 3 or most 4 seconds.’ Shipley was evidently well trained in the assessment of these seismic phenomena.

Shipley was also interested in numismatics. He had a considerable collection of ancient Roman coins and medals. Some were originals and others were sulphur casts made by Baron Phillipe von Stosch, from the great continental collections. Shipley was skilled at making plaster casts from these sulphurs as well as from his originals, and he appears to have undertaken to supply a set to Dr. James Parsons, the celebrated physician and antiquary. Baker told Shipley that ‘Dr. Parsons … will be very thankful for the Casts you intend him. I should likewise myself be very glad of any you have to spare which you have not favoured me with already, and in particular the Heads of all the Roman Ladies would be highly acceptable.’ Shipley replied on 3rd July 1748, promising ‘to send the Empresses Heads … as soon as I can possibly get them finished.’ In fact three years were to elapse before he was able to finish them. By then he had made a set of

5. D. G. C. Allan, William Shipley, p.34.
100 casts – representing the best of his own collection – and covering the ‘Roman Commonwealth’ as well as the Empire. He sent them to Baker in a five-drawer cabinet ‘stained of a fine red. The Gems being set on a ground of that colour,’ Shipley thought, ‘gives them a very pretty appearance.’

Within the limitations of his moderate means Shipley indulged the tastes common in his period amongst wealthy connoisseurs of art and science. He was also to emulate those of the rich who contributed to charitable endeavour. In this sphere, however, he became more than the follower of a trend of his time; he was to guide men of many classes towards a national objective.

Theobald tells us, and it should be remembered that his information was derived directly from Shipley’s reminiscences, that it was the enormously prosperous horse fairs at Northampton which first set Shipley’s mind working on the beneficial effect of rewards. He noted that the breed of horses had been improved as a result of the ‘King’s and other Plates’ given for racing. Hence he ‘concluded that if proper Rewards were to be given for any Improvements in our present Arts and Manufactures, for new or useful Inventions, it would not fail being productive of many happy Effects to this Kingdom.’ As a result Shipley conceived his idea of a Society to give rewards. Shipley’s Northampton friends thought his proposal too ambitious and he laid it aside until the ‘favourable circumstances’ of his fuel scheme lead to its revival.

According to Theobald, Shipley, began his

fuel scheme in 1751. Appalled at the high winter prices charged by dealers in coals and kindling and the consequent suffering of the poor, he urged the raising of a public subscription to buy fuel in summer time when prices were low. From this stock the poor would be supplied in wintertime at cost price. There was the expected set back: his scheme ‘at first met with the like Success as his Plan and through all commended it yet none would set their hands to the Subscription Book.’ Shipley then ‘resolved to try the experiment as far as his slender Fortune would admit of, and accordingly laid out Twenty Guineas in the purchase both of wood and coal.’ This action stirred the consciences of those he had originally approached and ‘perhaps unwilling a Stranger should run away with the merit of so popular and charitable an Action’ they subscribed a further 120 guineas and desired Shipley to be their Treasurer which he agreed to be for two years. Theobald continues his narrative by noting that fuel prices dropped by a considerable amount as a result of the scheme.7

A report in the Northampton Mercury, 16th September, refers to the ‘beginnings’ of the scheme and on 23rd October 1752 names Dr. [James] Stonhouse as Treasurer and Mr [Henry] Woolley as his deputy. Both men would have known Shipley through the circle of the late Dr. Doddridge, Thomas Yeoman and the Northampton Philosophical Society.8 It is curious that the newspaper fails to mention Shipley by name, though it would have not been uncharacteristic of him to keep himself in the background of a public endeavour. However, the significance of the Fuel scheme was that its success prompted Shipley ‘once more to think of his former plan’ and to put into the hands of several persons his Proposals for Raising by Subscription a Fund to be distributed in Premiums for promoting of Improvements in the Liberal Arts, Sciences, Manufactures, etc.’ Shipley had written to Baker from Northampton in July 1751 to say that his ‘Proposals’ were ‘much approved by Gentlemen of Fortune and taste.’ According to Mortimer’s enlargement of Theobald’s narrative he also took advice from persons living in the Northampton area. These were the Earl of Halifax, President of the Board of Trade, whose seat was at Horton, and some unnamed ‘ingenious and public spirited gentlemen in the neighbourhood’, who may well have included Dr. Doddridge and other members of the Northampton Philosophical Society. It was probably through Dr. Doddridge that he obtained an interview with Lord Halifax, but Doddridge died in Lisbon on 26th October 1751, and Shipley was deprived of a friend who might have given him powerful support. However, as Mortimer put it, ‘He also had a recommendation to the Reverend Dr. Stephen Hales of Teddington’9

Dr. Hales knew Lord Halifax and he had another Northamptonshire acquaintance who would most likely have been familiar with Shipley’s plans. This was Thomas Yeoman, the millwright who manufactured Hales’s ventilators, and who, as has already been noted, was one of the most active members of the Northampton Philosophical Society. Hales was also well known to Henry Baker. Clearly there were a number of links between Shipley’s circle and Hales’s, which helped to bring the two together; these links were to be strengthened by correspondence and personal contact between the principals.

For many years Hales had been advocating the public adoption of various inventions which he believed would be of national or humanitarian advantage. Shipley had heard that he ‘particularly recommended Naval Improvements’, and had told Baker in 1751 that the proposed Society might begin

8. Northampton Mercury, 11 Sept, 23 October 1752 (references kindly supplied by Dr. David Bates).
9. D. G. C. Allan, William Shipley, p.49; [Thomas Mortimer], A concise account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, Anno MDCCCLIV. Compiled from the Original Papers of the first Promoters of the plan; and from other authentic records. By a member of the said Society (London 1763).
Figure 2: The Northampton Fuel Scheme – a reconstruction by Anna Zinkeisen RDI, 1967 (RSA)
by offering premiums for inventions of this kind. In August 1753 he wrote to Baker saying that he had received two letters from Hales giving him ‘the greatest encouragement to proceed’ with his plans. Hales had shown the ‘Proposals’ to ‘many of our Nobility and from their general approbation of them he thinks it very probable that a scheme for putting them into execution may take place next winter.’ But he had advised Shipley ‘not to print the scheme as yet, lest the Gentlemen to whom it was shown might forget it by the time that they came to London’. Shipley followed this advice and did not publish his scheme until 7th December, by which time he had left Northampton ‘to reside in London [as Mortimer puts it] that he might have the better opportunity of attending the progress of his laudable endeavours of the service of his country.’

In the light of his numerous philanthropic activities and various scientific pursuits it is sometimes difficult to remember that Shipley was by profession an artist, and that during his stay in Northampton ‘he was employed by some of the best families...in taking Perspective views after Nature.’ As with the ‘views of Nobleman’s and Gentleman’s seats’ in other counties which he is said to have painted before he settled in Northampton these, with the possible exception of Twyford House, have not yet been traced.


Figure 3: Mezzotint of A Boy Blowing a Firebrand, from a painting by Shipley after Schalcken, 1751 (RSA)
In 1748 George Vertue, the chronicler of British Art, noted him as ‘William Shipley, painter, Northampton’. He was called a ‘landscape painter’ when he was teaching in London in 1754, yet the one work which has survived from his Northampton period is the copy of Schalcken’s ‘Boy blowing a firebrand’ he made from the original at Althorp.  

Shipley’s copy was engraved by Faber in 1751 and in 1753 he presented a framed version to the Northampton Hospital. The fact that he visited Althorp is of interest since it confirms his familiarity with ‘Noblemen’s and Gentlemen’s Seats’ which is also hinted at in his farewell notice in the Northampton Mercury for 27th May 1754:

William SHIPLEY, Painter, latterly resided at Northampton, BEING obliged to settle in London, takes this Opportunity to thank the Nobility, Gentry and Others, who have favoured him with their commissions

In the same issue he published the foundation ‘Notice to the Publick’ of the Society of Arts giving his address as Great Pulteney Street, near Golden Square, London.

With his small financial resources, Shipley took a momentous step in moving to London. For he received no payment for the time and labour he exerted on his project and he could not be certain that the Society he would found would ever be able to pay him or that his future drawing school would prosper as it did. The ‘Journey into Hampshire’ which he had made in July, and which included visits to Stonehenge and Avebury reported at length in his letter to Baker, may well have had as its principal object a visit to his family in Twyford, to seek advice on his London venture. Certainly he was now preparing himself to face the hazards of the metropolis.

His work as first Secretary, Register and Perpetual Member of the Society, and as Proprietor of his famous drawing school in the Strand, together with his return to Maidstone in 1768, led to the severing of his ties with Northampton. Yet he did propose as members of the Society of Arts William Hanbury, and Sir Thomas Samwell, who he had known as member of the Philosophical Society and the Rev. John Ryland, Baptist Minister at Northampton, and friend to Dr. Doddridge and Thomas Yeoman. Yeoman he would know as a London member of the Society of Arts in the 1760s. He sent to Charles Powell, the founder of the Brecknockshire Society, ‘The Rules and Orders of a Philosophical Society late at Northampton of which I was formerly many years a member’ Also Lords Halifax, Northampton and Spencer all joined the nation-wide Society.

His memories of his Northampton days were transmitted first to Theobald and then to Mortimer and have formed the basis of our understanding of the pre-history of the RSA.

Acknowledgements
Grateful thanks are due to the staff at the Northampton Museum, the Reference Library and the County Record Office for answering repeated enquiries; to Mrs. Susan Bennett, RSA Curator, for permission to reproduce the illustrations and for invaluable assistance in preparing the paper for publication; and to Dr. David Bates for sharing his perceptions of 18th-century Northampton history.

On Friday, 3rd August 1787, a melancholy procession left the County Gaol at North-

13. Northampton Hospital Minute Book, 17 February 1753 (reference kindly supplied by Dr. David Bates).  
ampton on its way to the place of execution. The six ‘malefactors’, as they were termed, who went on their last living journey included four members of the notorious band of robbers known as the Culworth Gang because they operated from, and mostly lived in, the village of that name. For more than ten years they terrorised large tracts not only of their own county but also of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Warwickshire.

Culworth is now a very quiet and peaceful village about seven miles from Banbury and away from modern motor highways. It is traversed, however, by two ancient droving roads, for the Welsh Road from Southam crosses the Banbury Lane to Northampton near to the village, and these two roads give ready access to other parts.

The two main sources of information about the gang have been first: a pamphlet entitled ‘The Last Dying Speech and Confession of the Six Malefactors who were executed at Northampton on Friday the 3rd of August, 1787’ (copies are held in the Local History Room at the Abington Street Library). Secondly there is an article written by James Beesley which originally appeared in the first three numbers of the Magazine of the Banbury Mechanics Institute for December 1837 and January and February 1838. These were reprinted in the journal of the Banbury Historical Society – Cake and Cock Horse, Volume 3 Number 1. Lesser sources have been the reporting of the arrest and trial of gang members in the Northampton Mercury and documentary evidence in the parish records of Culworth and Sulgrave.

In the preface to the reprint of Beesley’s article the Editor of the Cake and Cock Horse in 1965 – Dr. Barrie Trinder – said that a considerable amount of research into the subject had been done since 1838. Two members of the Banbury Historical Society were active in the study at that time – Dr. E. R. C. Brinkworth and Mr. Valentine Bromley, but it appears that neither published and both unhappily are no longer alive. Dr. Trinder also expressed the hope that ‘it will be long before a much more detailed account is published setting the exploits of the highwaymen firmly in the social context of the time.’ I do not claim that I have achieved this in what follows, but I have collected material from all the sources mentioned – some documentary evidence from the Parish Registers appears in print for the first time – and tried to relate it to the local contemporary background. Also, in many cases, I have pinpointed the places where the major robberies occurred.

Culworth is now a very quiet and peaceful village about seven miles from Banbury and away from modern motor highways. It is traversed, however, by two ancient droving roads, for the Welsh Road from Southam crosses the Banbury Lane to Northampton near to the village, and these two roads give ready access to other parts.

The two main sources of information about the gang have been first: a pamphlet entitled ‘The Last Dying Speech and Confession of the Six Malefactors who were executed at Northampton on Friday the 3rd of August, 1787’ (copies are held in the Local History Room at the Abington Street Library). Secondly there is an article written by James Beesley which originally appeared in the first three numbers of the Magazine of the Banbury Mechanics Institute for December 1837 and January and February 1838. These were reprinted in the journal of the Banbury Historical Society – Cake and Cock Horse, Volume 3 Number 1. Lesser sources have been the reporting of the arrest and trial of gang members in the Northampton Mercury and documentary evidence in the parish records of Culworth and Sulgrave.

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The contemporary pamphlet must still be the main source, and where I quote without attribution it is from this original account. When Beesley wrote he was only 50 years removed from the actual events and memories were still green – at least one of the robbers’ victims was still alive, as will be seen – so he was able to add personal recollections of what took place. He says (p.3) that the gang began with an association for the purpose of poaching and that the men involved at one time or another numbered about 15. He gives a graphic account of the leader of the gang, John Smith Senior, who ‘although considerably advanced in life’ (he was nearly 53 when he was hung) was ‘of great bodily strength and daring energy of character.’ His followers included his sons, William and John Junior and a colourful character named William Abbot in the pamphlet – Abbott in Beesley’s account – who was a shoemaker and parish clerk of Sulgrave, the neighbouring village now well known on account of its Washington connections. Beesley says that ‘he always carried pistols about his person, even when fulfilling the sacred duties of his office.’ It has been said that his behaviour is like something from a story by R. L.
Stevenson, and is particularly surprising when his antecedents are examined.

Other prominent members, according to Beesley, were William Bowers, William Tervill (Turrell in the pamphlet), Thomas Malsbury and Richard Jack, all labourers of Culworth. There is no mention of a Richard Jack in the pamphlet but a John Tack in the confession of Abbot. Beesley completes a list of ten by naming William Pettifer (alias Peckover in the pamphlet) and Richard Law. The last named was a carpenter and it was these two who by their carelessness led to the end of the gang for they ‘called at a Public-House in Towcester kept by one Duffin; and it being late in the Evening, they proposed staying all Night, which was agreed to. They had each of them a Bag, which were supposed to contain fighting Cocks, as they pretended to have been at a Cocking at Blakesley that Day; and when they retired to Bed, too confident in their own Security, they left their Bags behind them.’ The curiosity of the landlord did the rest. Peering in one of the bags, he found it contained two smock-frocks and masks. Since this was the disguise sometimes used by the gang Duffin sent to the Constable ‘and it was agreed between them not to make any Stir then, as they had no Doubt but some Plan was in Agitation.’

A few days later there was a robbery at ‘Sewell-Grounds’ (now Seawell), a farm a mile north of Blakesley adjoining the Banbury Lane. The imposing house now on the site was built for the Duke of Grafton in the 1840s, according to Pevsner, so it was a previous building that was entered. William Mayho, the farmer, and his wife were robbed of ‘what Money they had, with sundry Articles of Wearing-Appliance’, the robbers being ‘dressed in Smock-Frocks and had their Faces black’d.’

Following this Law and Pettifer were arrested and committed to gaol, although they strongly denied the crime. Well they might, for by an irony worthy of a tale by Thomas Hardy it was perpetrated by other members of the gang led by William Bowers. After some time for reflection Law and Pettifer ‘thinking that now the Chain of their Connexion was broke, the only way to save themselves was to discover what they knew’ – ‘impeached’ Bowers and the rest of the gang, confessing to 30 robberies going back 15 years.

Abbot confessed to 17 and following the arrests a warrant to search the houses of the robbers led to ‘great Quantities of stolen Goods of different kinds’ being found. To try to find the rightful owners these were advertised by the ‘Reverend Mr O’Clare,’ a local magistrate who was Rector of Maidford from 1772 until his death in 1798. (R. I. Longden, Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy, Vol.10, p.109). Stolen goods were found according to Beesley (p.4) not only in the homes of gang members but in a ‘vault dug under the floor of an old barn’ and in Sulgrave church, having been secreted by the Parish Clerk. A local tradition says that he even used the Parish Chest for some of the loot.

The robberies listed in the pamphlet were widespread and various ranging from ‘Stow-on-the-Would’ (Beesley says the victims were two men coming from Stow Fair, ‘In the bottom below Chipping Norton’) to ‘Hanslop’ in Bucks, and from an ‘ Axe and a Handsaw’ from a barn near Boddington to a full-scale attack on ‘Mr Richardson, the Oxford Carrier.’

On 18th January, 1785, seven of them ‘beset Mr Richardson about Eight o’clock at Night, and having an excellent Dog with him, one of them stuck him in the Shoulder with a Pitch-Fork, and four of them having seized Mr Richardson and his Son, the others drove his Cart behind the Hedge at Some Distance from the Road.’ There they pillaged the wagon at leisure and carried off money and goods to the value of £140. Today the sum seems trifling, but then the daily wage for a labourer was about one shilling (5p).

Beesley says (p.5) that this took place at Sturdy’s Castle, which is in Tackley parish where the line of the Akeman Street crosses the Banbury to Oxford road. Another robbery on that road – now the A423 – was in March 1786, at ‘Hopcroft’s Hold’ (now Holt). This is in Steeple Ashton parish
where the B4303 crosses the main road. There John Smith, Senior, William Smith and Abbot relieved a Mr. Owen of ‘his Watch, 9 guineas and a Half, and his Hat.’

One of their rougher encounters brought suffering to Mr. Wyatt, a farmer of Sulgrave-Grounds, about nine years prior to the end of the gang: ‘One of them, in the Middle of the Night, called Mr Wyatt up, under a Pretence of having a Drove of Pigs which he wanted to have taken in; but as soon as Mr Wyatt had got a few Yards from the Door, they knocked him down, and one of them stamped upon his Breast, whereby he was most shockingly bruised both on his Head and inwardly.’ He was then dragged into the house and shut in the pantry with his wife, while goods and money were taken to the value of more than £40. Not surprisingly Mrs. Wyatt, who was still alive, although old and infirm when Beesley wrote, could still give a vivid description of this incident. It seems that this was the utmost brutality they used on their victims and when compared with the atrocities perpetrated by modern thugs their methods seem relatively gentle.

On another occasion they were on the receiving end. On 23rd November 1783 the three Smiths, Turrel and Bowers tried to rob the house of Mr. Eaglestone, in the parish of Wolverton, Bucks. This was long before the building of the London to Birmingham Railway and the rise of modern Wolverton, and refers to the original village now known as Old Wolverton: ‘They put on Smock Frocks and black’d their Faces; and having met with one of Mr Eaglestone’s servants near Home, they led him to the House and threatened to murder him if he refused to knock at the Door, which being opened, they rushed in. Mr Eaglestone and his two Men immediately attacked them, and would have secured them all, but in the Confusion one of the Men received a terrible Blow from his Fellow Servant, which almost disabled him; though not before the Robbers had got so much the worst of it, that they were glad to make off without their expected Booty.’

Since Old Wolverton is at least 20 miles from Culworth it would seem that on occasions such as this they must have been mounted, rather than operating as mere footpads. On their way home they had enough energy left to rob a ‘Turnpike House.’ On another occasion Turrell, Bowers and Law stole money from the Toll House at Hoppersford, on the Brackley-Towcester Road (A43) near Whitfield, where there is still a farm of that name.

Naturally the majority of their exploits (approaching 30 out of 47) were in Northamptonshire and included theft from ‘Mr Higham, coming from Towcester Fair’ and from ‘a Stocking-Maker of his Baggs, betwixt Towcester and Abthorpe.’ Stocking manufacture was then a considerable local industry and there was an inn called ‘The Stocking Frame’ at Abthorpe until its closure about 1958.

A robbery from two men on St. Andrew’s Day between Brackley and Hinton is a reminder of the annual fair at the former place. One victim lost two and a half guineas and the other 30 shillings, a silver watch, a hat and a handkerchief. Another highway robbery was when John Smith Senior and William Abbot plundered a man on horseback of between £4 and £5 at ‘Plumb-Park-Corner’ on the Watling Street near Paulerspury.

Beesley speculates (p.3) as to why it took so long for them to be caught: ‘So well were their plans laid and so true did they keep to each other for upwards of ten years they continued to commit depredation after depredation without detection.’ Also he thought that in the course of time, for one reason or another, their numbers were diminished and though the neighbours of the ‘principal actors’ must have been suspicious on account of their not working and being frequently away ‘such was the fear and dread in which they were held that none would come forward to give testimony against them.’

After Law and Pettifer confessed, the various stages of the legal system of that day were reported in the Northampton Mercury. In the issue dated 14th April it said that the two men had been committed following the ‘Sewell-Grounds’ robbery, that they had
confessed to the attack on Richardson, the Oxford Carrier, and had implicated six others, including John Smith senior, William Smith, William Turrell and Benjamin Smith – the last-named for receiving. It also reported that the authorities were looking for two more of the gang. The 14th July issue said that when the Assizes began on ‘Tuesday next’ the following would ‘take their Trials’: Law, Pettifer, John Smith Senior, William Smith, Turrell and not only Benjamin Smith, but Elizabeth Turrell and Charles Dixon for receiving. It also said that Abbot had been committed and by his confession had implicated John Tack and William Bowers.

There are some puzzling omissions from this list. John Smith Junior, of whom more will be said later, does not appear on it, although Beesley says he was committed, and the final outcome of the trial seems to disprove this. Thomas Malsbury had taken part in at least four robberies according to the confession of Law and Pettifer, and yet does not appear, although it seems that he stayed in the locality, for Beesley says (p.6) that he ‘lived for some years afterwards at Culworth, when he was accidentally run over by a cart and killed on the spot.’

According to Abbot’s confession, John Tack participated in ten crimes but his absence from court may be explained by Beesley’s statement that ‘Richard Jack absconded’ when his confederates were rounded up (p.6) and ‘was never more heard of.’ In the Culworth Parish Register a John Tack married Mary Blencowe on 23rd June 1756 and it is difficult to tell whether the initial letter of the surname is ‘T’ or ‘J’ but the confusion over the Christian name is less easily accounted for.

The edition of the Mercury dated 14th July also gives details of a crime committed close to Northampton. The pamphlet says that Law, Turrell and Bowers robbed William Cotton ‘the Banbury Newsman’ and the newspaper adds extra details. Cotton is described as ‘one of the Distributors and this Paper’ and we are told that he was robbed on 21st November 1784 ‘near the Fox-Cover, at the bottom of Hunsbury Hill.’ From this it seems likely that he was following the Banbury Lane drovers’ track that, until the Southern Development of...
Northampton, ran along the flank of Hunsbury Hill.

The next number on 21st July, gave an account of the sentencing of the criminals and of the behaviour of Bowers in Court which was ‘the most hardened and abandoned that can be conceived – swearing and cursing upon every Occasion’. Also, when a witness testified ‘he declared (loud enough to be heard in all Parts of the Court) that Man had no more chance there than a Cat in Hell without Claws’.

By the end of the Assizes ten prisoners had been ‘capitally convicted.’ Of the gang members and their associates, William Smith and William Turrell, along with Benjamin Smith and Elizabeth Turrell were ‘delivered by proclamation.’ Why the first two named escaped in this way is not easy to determine, especially in the case of Turrell, who was implicated in crime number 21, by the confession of Law and Pettifer. There is no mention of John Smith, Junior, so like Malsbury he seems to have got off completely. But not for long.

The ten due for execution included five members of the gang: John Smith the Elder, Law, Pettifer, Bowers and William Abbot. There were also two weavers from Desborough, David Coe and John Hulbert, who were condemned for ‘breaking into the House of John Loake of Desborough, Victualler, in the Night, and stealing thereout a Flitch of Bacon and a Quantity of Pork, of the Value of Thirty shillings.’

The other three making up the ten were Thomas Ward and Cornelius Burrows (sheep stealing) and William Crowson for killing a lamb and selling the skin. These, along with William Abbot, were reprieved and sentenced to transportation. This may have resulted in William Abbot becoming one of the first involuntary settlers in Australia. In the *History of Australia* by M. Barnard it says (p.29) that prior to the American War of Independence convicts were sent to the plantations of Virginia at the rate of about 1000 a year. When this outlet stopped the prisons overflowed and from 1775 on hulks were moored in the Thames to provide accommodation.

Following a disastrous attempt to use Gambia in West Africa, when the majority of 746 convicts despatched found it to be ‘The White Man’s Grave’ it was reputed to be, Sir Joseph Banks in 1779 recommended Botany Bay as an alternative (p.31) and as a destination, that in the words of Lord Sidney, who asked the Treasury to provide vessels to take 750 convicts ‘whence it is hardly possible for persons to return without permission.’

Abbot could not have gone with the ‘First Fleet’ which sailed on 13th May 1787, but others followed and in the meantime he would have been lodged in one of the hulks. He is an interesting study and the Sulgrave Parish Registers tell us a little more about him. His predecessor as Parish Clerk was Richard Abbot or Abbott, both spellings being found. Richard witnessed marriage ceremonies during the 30 years prior to his burial on 20th May 1784. There were at least two William Abbots at Sulgrave during this period, but the one most likely to been the ‘malefactor’ was baptised on 8th December 1754, the son of Richard and Penelope Abbot. Significantly this entry is marked with a cross, so it seems likely that William followed his long-serving father in the post.

On 7th February 1777, a marriage was jointly witnessed by Richard and William (following the former’s death in 1784 William regularly witnessed these occasions, the last entry when he did so being 9th April 1787). This was at the wedding of John Lacey and Jenny Jakeman, so it seems possible that this was the ‘John Lacey’ who figures in Abbot’s confession in crime number 46 as having robbed a fishpond at Thorpe Mandeville in his company two years before.

A revealing entry on the front flyleaf of the register follows: ‘Aprill the 22d. 1787. John Wilcox Labourer first officiated as parish clerk of Sulgrave on the dismission [sic] of William Abbot by Appointment of the Reverend Richard Wykham, vicar of Sulgrave.’ A later note adds: ‘July 1787 William Abbot parish clerk was condemned at Northampton Assize to lose his Life for
Highway Robbery, but was afterwards reprieved for Transportation for Life.

For the Good and future Safety of this parish minuted down by Rd. Wykham Vicar of Sulgrave June the fifteenth 1788. The Rev. Richard Wykeham (as it is spelt in H. I. Longdon Vol. XV, p.233) was instituted at Sulgrave on 10th December 1760 and died and was buried there in 1805 so he seems to have had a close bond with the place and to have been a man of some sensibility, as a later extract from the registers will show.

He quotes from John Howard’s The State of the Prisons in England and Wales, dated 1777 (p.17) to give some idea of the building in which the men awaited their end: ‘The County have lately built seven commodious rooms for one Felon each; yet there is still a dungeon eleven steps underground, which might have been disused if they had doubled the number of the new rooms.’ He also reported that the Chapel was in the upper room in the Gaoler’s house and that it was painful for prisoners loaded with irons to go up and down the stairs.

Markham also gives a glimpse of the administration of the prison at this time, for he quotes a deed (p.15) whereby John Scofield (gentleman) was appointed gaoler in 1785: ‘John Scofield and his deputies should at all times convey to the place of Execution or Punishment to perform all manner of Punishments, Executions and Sorts of Death upon every Prisoner who may be sentenced, and will also bury them in some convenient place.’ When the time came for the designated ‘Sorts of Death’ to be inflicted on the leading members of the Culworth Gang ‘having received the Sacrament, and taken their last Farewell of their Friends, they were put into two Carts.’ The Mercury published on the following day, 4th August 1787, stated that the elder John Smith, Law and Pettifer were in one and Bowers and the Desborough weavers were in the other and that ‘The mournful Procession moved from the County Gaol about ten o’clock.’ The expression ‘in the cart’ was current in comparatively recent times to signify that some one was in deep trouble.

The route of the tumbrils along the Kettering Road passed the Bantam Cock Inn, which still stands in Abington Square, although in a comparatively new building and no longer on the edge of town, as it then was. Victor Hatley told me that according to local tradition condemned men were there allowed a final drink. He also located the exact site of the ‘Gallows Ground’ on the corner of Northampton Heath (the Race-course) between Kettering and Kingsley Roads, opposite where now stands the White Elephant, once the Kingsley Park Hotel. This area of ‘one rood’ is shown on the Enclosure Map made after the Act of 1778 and now in the Northamptonshire Record Office.

Another of Taylor’s Tracts in the Fourth Series of 1900 is titled ‘Executions in Northampton, 1277-1893’ and gives details concerning the use of this place of terrible memories. On page 6 is described a hanging ‘in the orthodox fashion’ in 1735, so it seems likely that the Culworth men were similarly treated: ‘the rope affixed to a crossbeam was put round her neck as she was standing on a cart, and the cart was withdrawn, leaving her dangling and strangling a few feet above ground.’

The chilling account refers to Elizabeth Wilkerson, hung for picking a farmer’s pocket of 30 shillings. On page 10 it describes how during the same period a condemned man ‘gave the signal by dropping a Hat, and was launched into eternity.’ Whatever the exact details of the execution involving John Smith Senior and his confederates ‘their Behaviour was very suitable for Persons in their unhappy Situation. They all acknowledged the Justice of their Sentence, and begged the surrounding Multitude to take Warning by their
untimely End. And about Twelve o’Clock
they were launched into Eternity’ (this seems
to have been a favourite euphemism – on
other similar occasions the cruder expression
‘turned off’ was used instead).

It is a well known adage that the prospect
of execution concentrates the mind
wonderfully and considering Bowers’
behaviour at his trial seems to have applied
here. The pamphlet also gives more details of
the victims: ‘Smith was near 53 Years of Age,
Bowers was about 36, and Coe Hulbert and
Law, were about 30.’ It goes on to say that
‘after hanging the usual Time, their Bodies
were delivered to their Friends. The
Concourse of Persons who attended the
Execution was very great.’

The mention of a very great ‘Concourse’
helps to explain why it was not long after
this occasion that the Race-course was used
for the last time in this way. The Tract
on
Executions says (p.12) that the final
‘performance’ there was in 1818 because of
the ‘immense’ and increasing crowds which
were apt to become unruly. Also, the ‘march
of the condemned through the public streets
was not in accordance with the growing
sentiment of the people’. At the execution of
John Smith and his fellows the Mercury
reported that it was ‘Supposed that more
than Five Thousand Persons were assembled
upon this melancholy Occasion.’ Since the
population of Northampton at the time of
the first census in 1801 was only 7,020 this
was an ‘immense’ gathering by the standards
of the day, and no doubt unedifying scenes
were witnessed. In 1819 the ‘New Drop’ was
built, with a trap door, at the back of the
Gaol, visible from all parts of Cow Meadow.

Two additional details concerning the
Culworth men appear in the Mercury of 4th
August. One was that John Smith was born
at Dunstow, although he had lived for many
years at Culworth and that Pettifer was born
at ‘Charlton by Newbottle.’ One of the local
traditions concerning the Culworth Gang
was that they were buried at cross-roads on
account of their misdeeds. This notion
received a fillip when two skeletons were
unearthed by workmen digging foundations
for a council housing estate at the corner of
the road to Weston-by-Weedon, as was
reported in the ‘Chronicle and Echo,’ 13th
February, 1953. The idea is not borne out by
entries in the burial register nor by Richard
Burn’s book on Ecclesiastical Law published
in 1797. On p.266 he says that all
parishioners were entitled to burial with
religious ceremony unless they were ‘persons
excommunicate, unbaptised, and that have laid
violent hands upon themselves’ (i.e. suicides
found sane by a Coroner’s Jury). So it
appears that the skeletons were of people
belonging to one of these categories rather
than executed robbers.

In the Culworth Burials Register there
appears the following record for 5th August
1787:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Reason</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>Senr.</td>
<td>executed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Law</td>
<td></td>
<td>at Northampton for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Pettifer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Highway Robberies, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately the incumbent at Culworth
was not so informative as the Rev. Wykeham
at Sulgrave, so I found only this bare entry.
There is no clue that I could find as to why
Bowers was not buried with his
confederates, for Beesley says he was living
there like the others. Perhaps no one
collected his body and so he was buried ‘in
some convenient place’ at Northampton by
one of the Gaoler’s minions. The Rev.
Wykeham tells us of one person at Sulgrave
who was not entitled to a proper burial at
about this time: ‘Poor Hannah Taylor an
excommunicate committed to the earth
without funereal respect July the 22nd 1791.’

There is one other entry in the Culworth
Registers that reminds us of perhaps the
most tragic aspect of the whole story of the
gang. Less than a year after his father was
buried – not ‘about two years’ as Beesley
says, but on 1st August 1788 it reads: ‘John
Smith Junior executed at Warwick.’ In the
pathetic farewell letter written by John
Smith the elder to his wife and family – not
the least remarkable feature of his case is
how a hardened criminal could show such
remorse and regret – he asked that his son
William should make his coffin and begged
his children to take warning from his end and to follow the ‘Paths of Virtue’. This it appears William did, for Beesley says (p.6) that he became an industrious and steady labourer: ‘a greater proof of his reformation cannot be adduced than the fact of his having worked for one master upwards of twenty years.’

His brother’s case was different, despite a special plea directed at him in a post-script to his father’s letter, asking him to marry Elizabeth Beard and ‘to be good to her and the child, and to take warning by me that they may live in comfort.’ Within the year he was on trial at Warwick for a highway robbery near Gaydon Inn in Warwickshire, where the Southam to Kineton Road (B4451) crosses the trunk road to Warwick (A41), about ten miles west of Banbury. During this trial, according to Beesley (p.6) he found himself before the same judge who had sentenced to death a man named James Tarvey (Tarry in the pamphlet) at the Summer Assizes of 1785, so that Tarry was executed at Northampton on 22nd July in that year.

John Smith Junior interrupted the judge ‘by telling him to beware for that he had once sentenced an Innocent Man to execution.’ This confirmed a statement in the pamphlet when it mentions a ‘Robbery committed on William Adams, near Chipping-Warden, in Northamptonshire,’ for which Tarry was hung and which he persisted in denying ‘to the last Moment of his Life, and at the Place of Execution desired the Spectators to remember his dying words ‘that he knew nothing of the Robbery for which he suffered.’ The writer of the pamphlet mentions this because Pettifer and Law had said that John Smith, Thomas Malsbury and William Smith were in fact the robbers, and laments that ‘an honest faithful wife and three children were thus loaded with the calumny attendant in such an ignominious exit.’ A curious footnote to this tragedy is given in the Tract on Executions which states that William Adams had no legs.

John Smith Junior’s ‘ignominious exit’ brought great suffering to his lover, called incorrectly Elizabeth Beard in his father’s letter. Her name was actually Beere, as Beesley apparently knew, for he referred to her as Elizabeth B---re (p.5). It seems possible that when he wrote either or both Elizabeth and her ‘chance child’ – as I once heard an old Northamptonshire countryman refer to a baby born ‘out of wedlock’ – may have been alive, so he partially masks her

Figure 2: Sulgrave church in the eighteenth century (Gentleman’s Magazine)
identity. In any case there were no doubt members of her family still living in her native village of Claydon. Mrs J. Hill of Claydon House tells me that the name (sometimes spelt, Beer, Bier or Beir) appears 'fairly regularly' in the Baptismal Register.

In fact, at the relevant time, there were three women of the name Elizabeth Beere in Claydon but the one most likely to have been involved with Smith was born on 27th July 1766. Apparently she came from a respectable and fairly well-to-do family since Owen, the elder brother of her father, Astell Beere, is listed in the Enclosure Map of 1776 as a property owner. Her liaison with John Smith Junior, can only have brought her sorrow but Beesley tells of her remarkable devotion (pp.5-6). She was present at Smith's execution and following it conveyed his corpse by night, on a donkey with two panniers, from Warwick to Culworth, a distance of at least 20 miles: a macabre journey showing constancy indeed.

There is one other member of the gang not mentioned in the pamphlet of whom Beesley apparently had knowledge. He tells a curious story of an unnamed confederate who was the 'son of very respectable parents in the neighbourhood' and supposedly went on the criminal excursions for 'the excitement and romance of their expeditions' rather than 'the Love of Plunder' (p.3). When the others were arrested he fled to 'the Indies' where he was thought to have grown rich. Homesickness finally drove him back but he was taken ill on the homeward journey and died soon after coming ashore, when little evidence was found of his presumed wealth (p.6).

In addition to the information already set out some facts about members of the gang were extracted from parish records by Mrs. Gillian Swingler, who included them in an article written for the Mercury and Herald of 24th September 1970. She says that William Smith was the eldest son of the leader of the gang and that Benjamin Smith, who was indicted for receiving, was another. William appears in the accounts of the Overseers of the Poor because after 1790 he became a 'roundsman', the name given to unemployed men in the parish who were required to go from farm to farm until they found employment as casual labourers, when their wages were paid half by the farmer and half from the parish. So if Beesley's statement is correct, it must have been subsequent to this that he worked 20 years for the same employer.

There is a record also that after the birth of Elizabeth Beere's daughter 1s 6d a week was paid for her maintenance. William Pettifer, Thomas Malsbury and John Tack all received parish money in lean times and after Pettifer's execution his widow was supported from the same source. The aged father of John Tack was wholly maintained by the parish, including payment for de-lousing. John Tack's name is no more seen after 1787, which seems to confirm his departure at that time. The name of Richard Law is present in the parochial records for a different reason. As a carpenter, he did maintenance jobs at the workhouse and made items such as spindles and bedsteads for the poor and so received payment from the overseers.

This brings me to the end of the facts I have met with concerning the Culworth Gang but there are three more local traditions to add to those already mentioned. After nearly 200 years there is still a strong belief that the gang used premises at Fernhill Farm as a meeting place and possibly as a refuge. The farm is in the north-eastern corner of Oxfordshire next to the Northamptonshire county boundary and even today is still somewhat remote, lying well back from the minor road from Thorpe Mandeville to Wardington. At the rear of the present farm house is an ancient barn which is not only a part of the outbuildings, formerly used as a stable, but thought to be part of the original farm house. The owner, Mrs. Lombard, kindly allowed me to examine the inside walls of the barn because it is believed that members of the gang left traces of their presence. Parts of the walls are plastered and there are certainly many graffiti on them but even with the agile assistance of Mrs. Lombard's daughter Carol we could find no names or initials connected with the
Culworth men and the only visible dates were 1840 and 1845. Parts of the walls are very inaccessible to view so that there may be relevant inscriptions we could not see. In any case Mr. George Lombard, Mrs. Lombard’s brother-in-law, told me that not only was there a strong local tradition of a connection with the gang but it was believed that one or more of the robbers were run to ground there.

I visited Fernhill Farm in the Autumn of 1984, having been pointed in that direction earlier in the year by the local knowledge of the brothers Lionel and Stanley Peckover, farmers of Home Farm, Wardington, which brings me to the third and, last and not least remarkable of the traditions lingering on from those far-off unhappy doings of the Culworth Gang. Their interest in the Culworth Gang is a most particular one. William Pettifer, who was one of the principals in the ‘performance’ on that day in 1787, was ‘alias Peckover’ and the Peckover brothers held by a family tradition that it was their ancestor who was ‘launched into eternity’ for his share in the crimes of the Culworth Gang.

Addenda
After writing an early version of this article, I heard from two local people who have traced their ancestry back to members of the Gang and could supply valuable information.

Mrs. Betty Spiers of Northampton has, along with her second cousin, Miss Nancy Moore, followed her lineage through members of the Robinson and Lines (initially Lynes) families to reach Matthew Abbott Lynes (baptised 12/1/1812). He was the youngest son of Thomas Lynes of Chipping Warden and of Elizabeth Abbott (baptised 8/10/1785) the youngest child of William Abbott, who was only two when her father was sentenced. She was married by special licence at Chipping Warden on 7th April 1803, both she and her husband being minors (under 21). Parental consent was necessary in such cases and her mother (nee Frances Blencowe) who died in 1821 at the age of 71, styled herself ‘widow’. Did Frances Abbott in 1803 know for certain that her husband was dead? Did he reach Australia? These questions Mrs. Spiers and Miss Moore intend to answer if possible by research in the nominal rolls of convicts shipped to the new colony. Whatever William Abbott’s fate it is of interest that the three latest generations of his descendants are now resident in the place to which he was consigned. For Mrs Spiers’ daughter, Mrs Lynne Burrows emigrated there in 1974 and her grand-daughter, Mrs. Tina Slocombe, has a son Shaun who is a native Australian.

John Tyrrell of Hardingstone has established that William Turrell or Tyrrell (there was a great variety of spellings of the name) was born in 1750 at Slapton and in 1775 married Martha Gibbs of Culworth. His name appears in the Militia List for the latter village in 1777. It is common knowledge that John Smith Junior was hung at Warwick within a year of his father’s execution but John Tyrrell has found in the Mercury for 1st March 1788 that his ancestor was even sooner in that situation: ‘William Tyrrell (one of the Culworth Gang) who was discharged at our last assizes for want of evidence, is, we hear, committed to Warwick Gaol.’

On 26th April 1788, it carried the report of his execution for ‘robbing Mr John Bricknell, on the highway, of five shillings, a canvas purse, pocket-knife and sundry papers.’ The 17th May issue says that John Smith Junior, had been ‘apprehended in Oxfordshire’ for the same crime and the report of Smith’s execution on 26th July says that the robbery took place on 23rd February – presumably near Gaydon Inn, as stated previously.

The 26th April report of Turrell’s execution along with two others said that while his companions’ behaviour was ‘very suitable and proper; at the fatal tree they appeared truly penitent’ that he ‘behaved in a most audacious and hardened manner; he refused in prison to join in prayer with the clergyman and his fellow sufferers. On his way to the place of execution he seemed totally unaffected with his deplorable situation, and even only five minutes before
he was launched into eternity, laughed at the executioner, who offered him an orange.’
Whether there was any connection between his conduct and his wife’s health one can
only guess, but she was dead only a few months later that year, leaving a family of five
children, one of them having been born in 1787.

John Tyrrell has possibly cast some light
on the Elizabeth Tyrrell who was tried for
receiving. In the Bishops Transcripts relating
to Abthorpe, among many Tyrrell entries is
the following: ‘William Bowers the illegitimate son of Elizabeth Tyrel [sic]
(William Bowers being the reputed father)
Baptized April 1st 1785.’ A final word on
William Turrell. The Sulgrave Register
records a person of the name buried there
on 19th April 1788. There is no mention of
his having been executed but this would tie
in with the report of his execution at
Warwick in the *Mercury* of the 26th April
edition which says that he was hung on 18th
April. Why the unrepentant robber was
buried at Sulgrave — if it were he — and not
Culworth can only be a matter for
conjecture.

A letter addressed to William Page, a
farmer of Culworth, from members of the
Culworth Gang, written while awaiting
execution in Northampton Gaol, was
recently found among the papers of William
Potts, an antiquarian of Banbury (now
lodged in the archives of Banbury Museum).
It was written in a somewhat crabbed hand
on the four sides of a doubled sheet of paper.
As we have seen, only four of these named
were hung at Northampton although two
were executed at Warwick in the following
year.

*Given to Mr William Page, Farmer of Culworth, 1787*

The Culworth Gang
I Pettifer T Bowers J Law T Tyrell
And 3 Smiths of Culworth

Dear Mr Page
this is to inform you that we have all
made our last dying speech and
confession, they have found us all Guilty
and we are sentenced to be hanged for
housbreaking and robbery.
Dear Mr William Page if us could put

right what us have done wrong, but it is
to late now us in gaol lay in a dreary
cell condemned to die.

If us had but took the advice of our aged parents
Dear Mr Page please to give our kindest love to
all our relations and friends that are at Culworth
and us send our kindest love to you and your
two sons James and Richard and all your family
may the Lord have mercy upon us
Dear Mr Page I hope you will tell all young men
that you meet with to take warning by our sad fate
this is our advice to all young men bad company
forsake and read and study the Bible

so farewell Mr William Page

I Pettifer
Please to give this to Mr William Page farmer at
Culworth.

Pray all young men a warning take
By the Culworth Gang and their sad fate
Found guilty all of robbery
Now are to hang on the gallows tree
Farewell all friends and relations Dear
No more in Culworth shall us appear
Take our advice bad company forsake
Shun not this warning before it is too late

Good Bye my aged parents
my wife and children dear
No more to meet upon this earth
our time is drawing near
When us our dead and in our graves
Pray think of this warning that to you us gave.

Acknowledgements
I wish to record my thanks to the helpful informants
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The Staff of the Local History Room at Northampton
Public Library, Abington Street.
Mrs. Sarah Gosling, Curator of Banbury Museum.
Mr. Lou Warwick, Editor of the *Northampton
Independent*

all of whom helped with valuable information, and
last but certainly not least, Mr. Martin Rowling of
Culworth, whose local knowledge was of particular
value.
King’s Cliffe: The Catholic Connection

PETER WASZAK

King’s Cliffe, a north Northamptonshire village some 12 miles to the west of the modern city of Peterborough, was once the base of a Catholic ‘Riding Mission’ where a priest was responsible for scattered Catholics in a considerable portion of the East Midlands and parts of East Anglia, a horse being necessary to cover the area. The present Catholic community in Peterborough (since 1976 part of the Diocese of East Anglia), of which All Souls Church in Park Road is the Mother church, can trace its local origins back to this Riding Mission.

In the church archives there survives the King’s Cliffe Baptism Register (which also includes marriages) commenced in 1799 and is the oldest original item.

Over the years a tradition has developed about those far off King’s Cliffe days. Certain writers refer nostalgically to the infant community which for several generations gathered for its services in what some refer to as an upper floor of a shed in the yard of the Golden Ball Inn in Bridge Street, some 100 yards from the parish church. Others mention, with obvious biblical overtones, a barn-like upper floor of a stable. Access to the chapel was said to be via an outside wooden ladder. The roof of the room, which could only accommodate about 20 people, was so low that the Priest was forced to stoop. But how accurate is this picture?

The 200th anniversary of the commencement of the old register is an appropriate occasion to attempt to disentangle tradition from hard historical evidence. Did the stable/shed chapel really exist? If so how long was it in use? Did Priests just live in what was referred to as the ‘Priest’s House’, or did they move around over time and were services conducted in various places in and around the village? To consider these issues we need to look at the origins and development of the King’s Cliffe Riding Mission. The building which before the 1970s was the Golden Ball Inn still exists and is now a private house classified as a Grade II listed building. Through the kind permission of the owner the writer obtained access and explored the various rooms. Further, the surviving deeds were available for study. This has helped to shed some new light on the Catholic community in King’s Cliffe.

Following the Reformation, for 232 years the practice of the Catholic religion was proscribed. Priests had a price on their heads. Discovery meant almost certain death and as a result the number of Catholics fell steadily. Whilst some of the great landowners remained true to the old Faith and were able to support their own Chaplains, for most Catholics, Priests were only able to make infrequent visits and Mass was said in secret in their homes. Priests tended to live in remote places far from towns and cities. In the north of Northamptonshire by the late eighteenth-century, the Faith had declined to what was described as a ‘slender spark’ kept alive among several old Catholic families residing in the area. The 1767 Returns of Papists recorded that the greatest number (20) were at Benefield, a village to the west of Oundle, with only one known Catholic, a butcher, living in King’s Cliffe. By 1800 there was only a single Priest in each of the Counties of Bedford, Buckingham, Cambridge, Huntingdon and Northampton.

1. A photocopy of the Register has been deposited at the Northamptonshire Record Office.
2. Margaret Osborne ‘The Second Spring’ Roman Catholicism in Victorian Northamptonshire, Northamptonshire Past and Present 1994-1995 pp.71–79. ‘At King’s Cliffe the Priest’s house was next to the Golden Ball Inn. Mass was celebrated in the upper room of the stable at the rear of the house, reached from the outside by ladder’.

Diocese of Northampton Centenary Souvenir 1850-1950, p.26. The Priest ‘occupied a house which has since been incorporated into the Golden Ball Inn. His Chapel was the room up the stairs. Access to it could be gained by external wooden steps from the yard of the Golden Ball without entering the house.’

Rev. G. A. Collins, unpublished research on Catholic history of Northamptonshire and the surrounding areas cites Cary-Elwes (see below) ‘it is a barn like upper storey of a stable.’
Figure 1: Plans of The Golden Ball, King’s Cliffe (Peter Waszak)
During the late 18th century hostility to Catholics declined and in 1791 the second Relief Act relaxed some of the old Penal laws and permitted the sacrifice of the Mass in registered chapels.

During Penal times, Catholics – for obvious reasons of security – did not keep detailed records of their activities, making an understanding of their early history very difficult. The King’s Cliffe register is the only original item in the All Souls Archives that survives from the Riding Mission days. In the early years of this century Canon Cary-Elwes, Missionary Rector at All Souls from 1910 to 1921, and later Bishop of Northampton, produced a series of articles on ‘Catholic Peterborough, Past and Present’. Although a massive work, Cary-Elwes devoted much space to the Genealogy of old Catholic families in the area. For information on the King’s Cliffe Riding Mission itself, Cary-Elwes relied heavily on correspondence with the descendants of King’s Cliffe parishioners who were asked to recall what their parents or relatives had told them about the old Mission whilst they were alive. As the Priest conducted his researches just before and during the First World War, he was asking correspondents to provide details of events in the first half of the previous century. Given the passage of time there was thus considerable opportunity for error as memory tends to fade over the years. This information was however supplemented by a visit to King’s Cliffe both to look at certain Priests’ graves in the parish churchyard and by a visit to the old Priest’s House itself.

In tracing the origins of the King’s Cliffe Mission, at All Souls Church Cary-Elwes discovered that the local Digby and Ravenscroft families in this period had been Catholics. At some point after Ravenscroft’s death the books were transferred to neighbouring Catholics in or around King’s Cliffe. These items became the property of the Riding Mission, and after its closure were passed on to the Peterborough Mission. Between 1754 and 1756 a Fr. Francis Hind is known to have lived in Luffenham. In the 18th-century the triangle of land between King’s Cliffe, Oundle and Benefield appears to have been a Catholic ‘hot-spot’. Known Catholics in those years included Dorothy Dunbar, Countess of Westmorland at Apethorpe (next to King’s Cliffe) in 1715, William Herbert, Duke of Powis at Biggin Hall, near Oundle also in 1715 (some of the hall servants were also known Catholics), and up to 1707 the Brudenells of Deene Hall near Benefield. It is known that Bishop Talbot visited the latter village in 1767 to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation, but there is no mention of him moving on to King’s Cliffe – possibly because at this time there were too few Catholics there?

In October 1778 an Irish Secular Priest, Fr. Anthony Barnewell travelled to King’s Cliffe to visit his brother John, also a Priest. Unfortunately, while there, he became ill, died, and was buried in the parish churchyard. Fr. John may not have been in the village long. In 1773 Bishop Hormyold of the Midland District reported to Rome that the only Catholic Chapel in Northamptonshire was at Warkworth (with 70 Faithful). Some writers have claimed that this is the earliest definite evidence of the King’s Cliffe Riding Mission. This, however, appears an over-statement. It is unknown how long Fr. John had been in the village, where he lived, or who were the local Catholics who supported him. Certainly there was no known wealthy Catholic family

3. ‘St. Francis Magazine’ published by the Diocese of Northampton between 1915 and 1921. The writer used the Bishop’s own personal copy with annotations. The copy is now held at the Northampton Diocesan Archives in Northampton.

4. Most of these names were derived from Fr. Godfrey Anstruther o.p. notes about ‘Recusants in Northamptonshire c.1600-1700’ obtained originally from Recusants Lists at the NRO. My thanks to Jerome Betts for a copy of Anstruther’s notes.
in the village. In 1777 a Thomas Carrington of King's Cliffe had married Elizabeth Jinks of Benefield at King's Cliffe parish church, both were known Catholics. At this time it was illegal for a Catholic Priest to perform a marriage. Who the Carringtons were in this period is unclear, but it is very doubtful if they would have been able to contribute to the upkeep of a Priest. An Athanasius Carrington, a known Catholic, was recorded in King's Cliffe in 1723 as a borrower of books. In 1781 Fr. John Barnewell moved to Shefford, Bedfordshire, only to die in the following year. He was buried next to his brother at King's Cliffe.

For the next decade the spiritual needs of Catholics in the area were served by the occasional visiting Priest. These included a Chaplain from Eastwell House in Leicestershire, and several Priests from a Riding Mission centred around the village of Buckden on the Great North Road in Huntingdonshire. In 1773 Bishop Hormyold had reported a Chapel with 80 Faithful in Huntingdonshire which is presumed to be Buckden. As these visits would have been infrequent Mass would probably have been said in private houses, or in case of difficulties possibly in a secluded spot in the woods that surrounded King's Cliffe. In December 1793, a Rev. Dr. O'Brien arrived to establish (or re-establish) the Riding Mission. Apart from a long absence between August 1795 and October 1798 when Catholics had again to rely on visiting Priests, he remained in the village until 1804. It was Fr. O'Brien who began the Register in 1799. No record exists of where the Priest lived or where Masses were said. Early entries of Baptism include Oundle, Weldon, Warmington, Stamford, Benefield and Buckden, although it is not certain that King's Cliffe was the main centre of the Riding Mission, it may have been one of several centres. With regard to the Mission's finances, Cary-Elwes, in his researches, discovered that Fr. O'Brien received some income from a 'Digby/Conyers fund.' This is believed to have been a bequest to the church by Catholics in the area (the Digby family, as we have seen, had connections with Luffenham). The money must have paid for the Priest's lodgings and subsistence as well as stabling and upkeep of his horse.

In 1804 Fr. William Hayes arrived in King's Cliffe and was to remain until his death in 1855. He was interred alongside his brother Priests in King's Cliffe parish churchyard. It is unfortunate that after his death a Fr. O'Connor of Stamford destroyed all Fr. Hayes papers. It was for this reason that about 55 years later Fr. Cary-Elwes had to approach people like Mrs Joseph Jinks of Yarmouth whose aunt, Anne Carrington, had been Fr. Hayes' housekeeper for many years, for information about the old Riding Mission. According to the Baptism Register an Anne Carrington stood sponsor to most of the candidates for baptism from 1809 to 1847. This appears to indicate that the Carrington family was the key to the King's Cliffe origins of the Mission, but the surviving evidence is insufficient to confirm this. According to the 1851 Census, in a property next to the Golden Ball Inn in Bridge Street had lived William Hayes aged 76, a Catholic Priest born in Bethnal Green, Middlesex. With him was Anne Carrington, aged 64, his housekeeper, born in King's Cliffe. Anne Smith, aged 53, a widow, was listed as a servant.

In July 1913 (not 1912 as appeared in the St. Francis' Magazine), Canon Cary-Elwes and W.H. B. Saunders, the Catholic editor of the 'Peterborough Advertiser' visited King's Cliffe. The All Souls Mission book records that they 'made many interesting discoveries and took several photographs … The visit is to eventuate a 'brochure', written by Cary-Elwes (!!!) — those [sic] mean that it ought to be good for it has been in contemplation for a score of years and may be for another'. In fact it was to be only five years before Cary-Elwes’ account of his King's Cliffe researches appeared in the St. Francis' Magazine.

In 1996 the writer made several visits to
the former Inn to compare Cary-Elwes’ account with what exists today. It was immediately apparent that considerable changes had taken place over the last 86 years – in particular following the closure of the public house on the 28th March 1971. The property had been modernized and converted into a single dwelling. Internally old doors were blocked up and new openings made and levels altered. The building today is a warren of rooms, corridors and steps. An undated plan of Messrs. Morris, Rutland Brewery Co. Ltd., which was found among the deeds, has been a great help to establish the old layout.

According to Cary-Elwes’ account:

The Priest’s House was next to the Golden Ball Inn, on the right hand side of it, and part of the same structure ... we found to be standing very much in the same condition as it stood when Fr. Hayes died there. It is now part of the Golden Ball Inn. The original portion of the Inn stands to the east of the Priest’s house, but some years ago the proprietors purchased it ... so that the sign of the Golden Ball swings now from the front of the Priest’s house.

On the other side - the west - is a small tenement, now occupied as a shoemaker’s shop ... as far as the outside appearance is concerned ... running along the front is a sort of lean-to building. The front door opens into this, and is furnished with the original old-fashioned heavy door knocker. The window on the left is that which would be the Priest’s study or living room.

Today, when viewing the property from across the street, the left hand side (the old Inn), appears to be 17th century. To the right, the style of the Priest’s house suggests it was built in the eighteenth century. Both properties are of local lime-stone with Collyweston stone slate roofs, the former junction between the two parts is marked by a change in the roof pitch. Next to this the 1913 photograph shows the shoemaker’s...
shop set back from the street and which it is believed was demolished as unsafe around January 1926. The angle of roofline of the shoemaker's shop is still visible in the stone wall of the Priest's house. The ground floor projection with a lean-to roof still exists, although it is unclear if it dates from the time of the Riding Mission. On the front elevation the 1913 shuttered window and doorway have been replaced by two large modern windows. The doorway, which is not in current use, has been repositioned to the right of the wall that led to the shoeshop. Below the window the lighter coloured stone further marks the position of the former door. The original doorstep is visible beside the pavement below the right hand window. The tall stone chimney in the 1913 photo at the front of the house has gone, although its base below the first floor level remains. There is little change on the front of the old pub apart from the removal of signs and the windows being painted white. The street curb has been tidied up. The bay window at first floor level was originally the Priest's bedroom. Above is a small attic window.

With the permission of the then landlord Cary-Elwes and Saunders entered the Priest's house by the front door, which no longer exists. Beyond there is a small hall or passage, and the Priest's study is on the left hand, there being another room more to the back on the other side, and the kitchen behind the study [the sitting room, living room and scullery on the plan]. The Priest's study is, as a room, just as it was when Fr. Hayes left it. The boarden [sic] floor is extremely uneven with age. There are heavy beams crossing the ceiling, and as Fr. Hayes is described as being a very tall man his head would probably have come into contact with them, but he could have stood upright in the other parts of the room.

Today the private entrance, sitting and living rooms have been converted into one large room. The beams in the ceiling remain and have been reinforced by a modern steel joist hidden behind timbers to give an old appearance, although, as the floor has been lowered and tiled, there is now no difficulty in standing upright. Beyond the rear room, marked 'scullery' on the plan, the barrel yard has been enclosed to form a modern kitchen area. The main feature of the former study is a massive stone 'inglenook' fireplace, although the spiral staircase once on its right (see plan) has been removed.

Back to the 1913 description:

Leading from the little hall or passage is a staircase into the room which the landlord assured us was the old chapel. Almost every year, he said, some old people would come ... who had been accustomed to worship in the chapel, and they had all told him that that was the room in which the services had been held. Besides being accessible from the Priest's house, it can also be reached - and that was the way we entered - by wooden steps, or rather, a broad ladder, from the outside from the Golden Ball yard [on the plan marked as the Bottled Beer Store], and it is more than probable that this was the public entrance so that worshippers would enter the chapel without passing through the Priest's house. The room is exceeding low – it is a barn-like upper storey of a stable ... it was full of lumber when we saw it, and it required a strong effort of the imagination to picture it with the altar and its adjuncts, and the little handful of faithful worshippers.

It is at this point that problems with Cary-Elwes' interpretation arise. From his description it is clear that he never went up the spiral steps by the fireplace. Perhaps he and Saunders sensed that the landlord was unwilling to let them explore his bedrooms. They went out into the yard and up an external wooden ladder to the 'loft'. From the plan it is obvious that there was no access from the Priest's house bedroom/landing to the bottled beer store, loft other than via the ground floor.

The writer was taken up the former public house steps and along a landing, at the end of which on the right (the front of the house) is the old Priest's bedroom. In the
bedroom set in the north wall are the remains of a stone fireplace with an alcove on its right. The bay window is probably a later addition. On some of the walls there is modern imitation oak panelling. Today, at the end of the landing, there are two adjacent doors separated by a modern partition. The left-hand door gives access by a post-1971 opening into the former bottled-beer store loft which has been converted into a further bedroom. The room is not a true oblong but is approximately 17ft 5in long by 12ft 4in wide. The outside wall by the window is 14 inches thick. The ceiling is about 6ft 8in high although the exposed beams may not be that old and could be decorative. In the west wall is what appears to be the remains of a stone fireplace. The right-hand corridor door leads to a modern ladder up to a trap door. Through the treads can be seen old wood spiral steps, presumably a continuation of the former spiral stairs by the ground floor fireplace.

There is evidence that the old beer store and loft were originally a barn, possibly built in the 1780s. The structure has a Mansard roof of Dutch style. Looking along the roof space above the former loft the left-hand side had recently been rebuilt and felted. Where necessary ‘new’ second-hand timbers appear to have been inserted. However, on the right the timbers are earlier and the slates exposed. Here the rafters are very old and part rounded, and would have been considered too rough for domestic use. They could well be the original timbers. The roof space is approximately 19ft long, with a maximum width at floor level of about 13ft 2in. The height to the roof ridge is 7ft 3in. However, access is made difficult by two substantial horizontal timbers only 3ft 10in from the floor to the bottom of the beams. A full examination of the area is not possible as part of the roof is covered in chipboard. It is almost certain that the old loft would have been originally open to the rafters, although the timbers forming the present bedroom

**Figure 3**: View from the garden of the Golden Ball Inn in May 1999. The converted barn/bottled beer store is on the left. Note the Mansard roof. The first floor windows are later insertions (Michael Norton)
ceiling were not accessible. Clearly the position today does not tie in with the tradition of a low roofed chapel above a barn. The possibility that the existing first floor level is a modern arrangement and is lower that the original loft floor is doubtful. From the outside it is possible to see in the stonework the blocked off doorway into the loft (see plan). This is just below a modern window. Today, on the ground floor, the old barn/beer store has been extended into the barrel yard and the extension given a flat roof. As far as one can tell the stonework marking the blocked doorway ends just above the flat roof indicating that the floor level is original.

In 1913 the loft was full of lumber. We know that Cary-Elwes was unable to enter the loft and consequently had failed to appreciate its true dimensions. Although the loft was not the traditional 'upper floor of a wooden shed', the 'barn-like upper floor of a stable' is nearer the mark, but for its size and height. From the evidence of the building as it exists today and given that there have been many alterations it seems very doubtful if the loft could have been the chapel of tradition. If this was the case, then where was it?

There is one remaining possibility - the front attic. Turning right at the top of the steps, mentioned earlier, one passes the massive rough stonework of the chimney rising from the ground floor fireplace into a small room with a window overlooking the street. The room now has a modern chipboard floor. Although the plaster from the old ceiling and on the partition between the room and an adjoining attic has been removed, three surviving areas of plaster indicate that the room had once been painted red. Excluding a small alcove on either side of the chimney (there is no fireplace although the warm stones would have provided some heat) the measurements of the room are 12ft 5in long by 11ft 10in wide. If the plaster ceiling was in position it would be about 5ft 6in high. The room could probably hold 15 to 20 people in cramped conditions, and certainly someone tall would have to stoop. As with the roof over the left-hand part of the old barn, there is evidence of a certain amount of re-roofing work on the west (garden) side. The timbers appear more modern and there is felt below the slates. In contrast the road side is mostly of older timbers, with some modern replacement. Some of the timbers around the attic window appear to be particularly old. Near the entrance into the loft/attic there is some very rough stone work to the left of the chimney breast. This could be part of the removed upper spiral steps, or what was once the outer wall of the house before the barn was built?

That this was the correct location of the chapel appears to be supported by the 1851 Census on Places of Religious Worship. This Census, unknown to Cary-Elwes, indicated that the King's Cliffe Roman Catholic Chapel was 'Not separate building' and 'Not exclusive place of worship.' It was 'An upper room of the Minister's house' with a general congregation of 10. The chapel was used on alternate Sundays. The wording 'An upper room of the Minister's house' is significant. If the chapel had been in the barn loft would not the entry have been something like 'An upper room in an adjoining building?'

If the attic was really the chapel of tradition one needs to explain the strong appeal of the loft above the barn, and also the existence of an alternative public access. Today there is a common roof space between the roof above the old loft and that above the attic, although partly blocked by the massive chimney. The intervening wall does not continue above first floor level. If this was true in the days of the Riding Mission it would have been a simple matter to erect a second ladder in the loft for the congregation to gain access to the attic. Even if some form of partition existed up to the rafters (there are indications that the barn and Priest's house were probably built in different periods), it would have been a simple matter to create an opening. This is of course just speculation but it appears to be a reasonable deduction. As the Mission had closed some 57 years before Cary-Elwes'

visit, the exact details of access to the chapel may have become clouded in people’s memories. The frail or elderly would have found access to the chapel almost impossible, perhaps they were allowed to use the Priest’s house and listen from the corridor by his bedroom? As a location for a chapel the attic had several advantages, its location at the top of the house afforded a degree of privacy, peace and absence of outside distractions not possible at lower levels.

Further there is a matter of cost. Although the finances of the Mission are lost in time it would almost certainly have been poor. The surviving deeds indicate that the property was copyhold to the lord of the manor of King’s Cliffe who was Lord Exeter of Burghley House, a family that was once very hostile to Catholics. Did the Lord of the Manor know that he had a Catholic Priest in one of his properties? An 1849 Abstract of Title records ‘Hayes held by Copy of Court Roll of the said Manor under the yearly Rent of 9½d.’ Fortunately, copyhold rents were medieval rents fixed by the custom of the manor and because of inflation over the centuries had in effect fallen to very low levels. As the tenancy does not appear to include the loft, its use as a Chapel would have incurred extra and avoidable outlay. As in Fr. O’Brien’s time the mission’s finances are obscure. When Fr. Hayes died he left £300 in his will for the relief of infirm and necessitous Priests, a surprisingly large amount. Did Fr. Hayes have some sort of private income?

However, in 1806 it was recorded that King’s Cliffe was the ‘Riding Mission of Northamptonshire.’ Perhaps some wealthy Catholics in other parts of the county were able to contribute to the upkeep of the Mission. In that year Bishop Milner noted that apart from 13 Catholics in King’s Cliffe, there was a total of 32 in Warmington, Benefield and Oundle (this included children), 7 at Duddington, 4 at Stamford, 4 at Spalding, 8 at Eye and 8 at Buckden, a total of 76 persons. From the Baptism Register the area covered was considerable

Figure 4: The interior of the attic in May 1999. Note the rough stonework to the left of the chimney and the low beams in the roof (Michael Norton)
and included Warmington, Oakham, Barnwell, Yarwell, March, Thorney, Huntingdon, Wisbech, Buckden, Whittlesea, Peterborough, Oundle, Thrapston, Market Harborough and Kettering. As far as one can tell most of the Catholics were poor. According to the 1851 National Census four different Carrington families lived in King’s Cliffe, three were listed as agricultural labourers, while one was a manufacturer of wood ware (it is not definitely known if any were Catholics).

Over time the area covered by the Riding Mission decreased as other Missions were established. A chapel was opened in Oundle in 1808 served from King’s Cliffe. In the early 1820s Bishop Milner sent Father George Jinks to Oundle in order to ease the burden on Father Hayes. The Priest was born there in 1793 and the Jinks were a well known Catholic family. However, after only two short periods in the town, Father Jinks was moved to the Mission of Hathersage in the High Peak west of Sheffield. An unsuccessful chapel followed in Stamford in 1826. There the Mission was re-established in 1834. Wisbech followed in 1840 and Peterborough in 1847. By 1851 Fr. Hayes served just Oundle and King’s Cliffe on alternate Sundays. By this time no Catholic families existed in King’s Cliffe and only a few Irish servants employed in the neighbourhood attended the chapel. After Fr. Hayes’ death Peterborough served Oundle until 1894 when its chapel closed.

As so few records survive of the old Riding Mission its history is bound to be very sketchy. The old Catholics that were able to help Cary-Elwes over 70 years ago were only able to supply basic details of the Mission’s latter days. No one was alive who could remember the time of Fr. Hayes arrival, or of the earlier Priests. We cannot be certain that Fr. Hayes lived next door to the Golden Ball Inn when he arrived in King’s Cliffe or indeed if Fr. O’Brien had used the same rooms. As the property was not owned by Catholics there appears to be no obvious advantage for a Priest to reside there as opposed to any other place in the village where reasonable terms were available. As it is unknown when the Riding Mission was established, given the somewhat nomadic existence of the late 18th-century priests, their accommodation needs were relatively short term. In the latter years of the 18th century King’s Cliffe could simply have been a centre of the Northamptonshire Riding Mission and not its centre. From the deeds we know only that Fr. Hayes definitely lived next to the Golden Ball Inn from 1849 onwards. It is only tradition that links him to the property in earlier days. Similarly, the barn loft chapel is a later rather than an earlier tradition. There is no positive evidence of a ‘permanent chapel’ before the 1851 Census, although, as Bishop Milner conducted the Sacrament of Confirmation in King’s Cliffe in 1805, this suggests the existence of some form of chapel room in which to hold the service. It is possible that Mass was first said in the barn loft chapel and at some time later was transferred into the attic, perhaps after a Priest had taken up permanent residence in the house.

The old tradition of a barn loft chapel is still strong. While visiting the Priest’s house in 1996 the owner told the writer of a recent visit by a Catholic monk to view the loft. Although we can never be 100 percent certain there is now a strong case to regard the attic above the Priest’s house as its most likely location.

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The writer is the (Hon.) Archivist at All Souls Church and would like to thank the Parish Priest, Fr. David Bagstaff for his encouragement in writing this article. Also to Mr. and Mrs. Anstie for permission to examine and photograph their home, to Mr. Michael Norton for the photographs, to Jerome Betts for sharing the results of his own researches into penal Catholics in Northamptonshire and Mr. Geoff Cameron for redrawing the plan (enclosed).

Woad-Growing in Northamptonshire

VIVIEN BILLINGTON

My interest in the dye-plant woad or wad (Isatis tinctoria) was aroused after a family historian from Yorkshire, interested like myself in the surname Pickering, asked if I would mind looking up a couple of events in the Maidwell register. On doing so, I was intrigued to find Pickerings described as ‘of the woad’ or ‘sojourners’ and other people described as ‘woadman’ or ‘belonging to the woad.’ I remembered having read that woad growers used to move from one parish to another because the crop exhausted the soil and realised that in a county such as Northamptonshire, which is poorly covered in the International Genealogical Index (IGI), searching for peripatetic woadmen ancestors would be like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. An enquiry to the Northamptonshire Record Office revealed that it already had a file on woad, and in particular an anonymous manuscript index of 175 baptisms, marriages and burials from 40 Northamptonshire parishes and 3 in Rutland, mainly from the eighteenth century, arranged by parish and by surname. I decided that trying to expand this index would be an interesting project, and one that I could, to some extent, work on at home in Bath if I could enlist the help of other family historians.

In the January 1988 issue of Footprints, the journal of the Northamptonshire Family History Society (NFHS), I invited members to send me references to woad-people, and have subsequently had updates on the index published in Footprints, both seeking and offering help. I also contacted the family history societies and Record Offices of neighbouring counties, as it soon became obvious that woad-people moved not only from parish to parish but from one county to another.

One of the first people to respond was Mrs. Peggy Edmond, who wrote that she had already been searching her Jeacock/Jaycock woadmen ancestors for three years. Her article ‘Was your Ancestor an Ancient Brit?’ describes her searches into her own family and gives a general account of the woad industry from Elizabethan times. Peggy later sent me a chronological list of the Jeacocks she had found in Northamptonshire, indicating those who could positively, or probably, be identified as woad-people. This proved invaluable in locating other woad-people, who tended to travel in family groups and marry within the woad community. Other correspondents with a special knowledge of the surnames Vines, Powell, Pickering, Lawson, Ginns and Marlow have helped to establish which bearers of these names were woad-people and which not. Helpful contributions have also come from people who have transcribed parish registers or come across references to woad during their own research.

Information about woad, where it exists, is widely scattered in specialist journals, books and original records, and little is to be found in the average public library or even in County Record Offices. I am therefore grateful to those people who, over the past 12 years, have steered me towards useful reading matter to fill in the historical background, notably Woad in the Fens by Norman T. Wills and Alternative Agriculture and Economic Policy and Projects by Dr. Joan Thirsk to whom I am also most grateful for the help she has given me in correspondence.

1. Footprints, July 1988, Vol.9, No. 4.
2. Wills, N.T., Woad in the Fens, 3rd edn. 1979. Published privately (copy at NRO).
Figure 1: The distribution of Woad-growing in southern Northamptonshire. Evidence is variable in both quantity and quality (Vivien Billington)
Figure 2: South Northamptonshire parish names
The Woad Plant and its Cultivation

Woad is a biennial belonging to the *brassica* family. In its first year it looks much like spinach beet and in its second year it throws up a single stem with a head of honey-scented yellow flowers. It needed careful weeding to encourage growth, and in favourable conditions yielded 4 to 5 crops a year. Leaves were picked from June onwards, largely by the women and children, taken to a horse-powered mill and ground to a pulp. This was formed into balls or wads, which were placed in open-sided drying racks or ranges to dry in the air. When dry, the wads were powdered and wetted again and then fermented or ‘couched’ to bring out the colour by oxidization. This was a skilled and smelly process, and the odour permeated the woadmen’s clothes and skin. The resulting clay-like substance was then packed into casks to be sent to dyers in Yorkshire, Lancashire and elsewhere. Sometimes the couching process was not carried out on site, but the dry wads were packed into barrels for couching by the dyers. A select portion of the crop would be left over winter to flower the following year to produce seed for future use. The traveller Celia Fiennes described one such project about 1694 in the Cotswolds. It was a site of about 12 acres, which she said would employ 2 or 3 families, men, women and children, and she commented that the smell was so strong and offensive that she could not force her horse near it.

From early times the woad plant was cultivated for the rich blue dye which could be produced from its leaves, and which also formed the basis of blacks, greens and other dark colours. But in the later Middle Ages, when the English cloth industry was in high repute, woad was largely imported from France, Italy, Spain, the Low Countries and Germany. Then, in Tudor times a combination of economic and political factors led to official steps being taken to encourage woad-growing on a commercial scale in England, so that the country could be self-sufficient and save on loss of bullion. There was always the threat of foreign supplies being cut off, and a heavy duty imposed by the French on woad exports about 1579 caused a sudden rise in the price of foreign woad. This, combined with a fall in the price of grain a few years later, made farmers keen to try something profitable like woad, and it was widely tried out on a variety of terrains. An official census of 1585 showed that woad occupied 1,700 acres in Hampshire and 657 acres in Dorset. In the late 16th century it was both encouraged and (as a novel crop) subject to bureaucratic controls, but in 1601 the controls were swept away and woad-growing was allowed freely except within three miles of London and around royal palaces, because the smell of fermenting woad offended Queen Elizabeth.

There was a long learning process over the next several decades before the best routine for growing woad was found. As a biennial, it did not fit into the annual rotations of the old open-field system, and it was not wanted in mainly arable areas or on rich permanent pasture more suitable for dairying or livestock feeding. But, as an exhausting crop, to be grown for two, or at the most, three years, it was useful on pastures that had deteriorated and were ready to be ploughed for woad and then followed by a cereal crop for two or three years before being returned to grass. Centuries of grazing made the soil too rich to be followed immediately by cereals, but woad took some of the excessive richness out of the soil and helped get rid of soil pests extremely destructive of corn. The land could then be ploughed again for woad in 15 to 20 years’ time. The crop required capital and enough land to keep at least one mill occupied, so tended to be grown by the larger farmers and landowners and later by specialist woad-growers.

From as early as the late 16th century, there had been some competition from imported indigo, which gave a stronger blue and was less expensive, but woad was widely grown on suitable land throughout the 17th and 18th centuries and particularly up to

around 1750. Dyers themselves held the view that woad was needed with indigo to aid fermentation in the woad vat and make a longer-lasting dye than indigo alone. More serious competition arose in 1878 when artificial indigo was created in the chemical laboratory, but woad continued to be grown by a devoted few farmers in the Lincolnshire fens until the last crop was harvested in 1932.

For Northamptonshire, no returns survive from the census of 1585, but Walter Blith in 1652 listed the county among the ‘rich upland countries’ meaning the Midland counties from Gloucestershire and Worcestershire in the west to Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Rutland and Northamptonshire in the east where the best estates have been got by it’. Further research would be needed to illustrate this statement, as my information so far is mainly for the 18th century, with a more limited number of events from parish registers back to around 1640. The county naturalist John Morton, in 1712 wrote that for him Northamptonshire was the county which ‘is, or has been, woaded most’.

The 1777 Militia Lists mention only three woadmen in two parishes, Thomas Neal and Thomas Powel in Weston Favell and Valentine Adams in Watford. This seemed surprising at first, but it has to be borne in mind that whilst ‘woadman’ was used to distinguish one occupation from another, it was also used in some cases to indicate status – the entrepreneur who negotiated with landowners and dyers and the experienced craftsman on whose skill the quality of the

woad depended. Those lower down in the woad hierarchy often appear in registers under such descriptions as 'labourer about woad', 'belonging to the woad grounds' or 'from the woad cabbens/cabbins'. Some men who can be identified as woad-people appear in the lists as labourers, poor men with three children or as having already served in the Militia. For instance, Abraham Powell appears in the 1777 Militia Lists at Whilton as 'labourer, drawn last time for Watford.' In the 1786 Militia List for Watford he is described as woodman.

By the early 19th century only two 'woad growers' lived in the county according to William Marshall reporting to the Board of Agriculture in 1818, one growing about 70 acres. He made the point that woad was cultivated and prepared for the dyers, not by the farmers, but by professional men who paid the landowner an extraordinary rent for two or three years. He mentioned having seen about 50 acres of it at Catesby near Daventry in August 1806 and that it needed rich old pasture land.

A fuller account of woad-growing was given by the Rev. St. John Priest in 1813. Though writing about a 25-acre site at Newport Pagnell, Bucks, the woad grower was a Mr. Neal of Watford, who rented the site 'to grow woad for four years successively upon sward, after being in the first instance pared and burnt. Mr. Neal brings his own servants with him; and upon a spot of ground near to the land which he hires, he erects a millhouse and mill for bruising the woad, as soon as it is cut and carried from the ground where it grows; and near this house are huts, built of turf and wood, for the families which he brings with him. Here they remain as a colony for four years, during which time they look out for another portion of sward land, to be cultivated in the same manner.' The mill might have one or more rollers, each pulled by a horse. Sometimes a barn and other buildings might be available at the site for the woad-people to use. For example, there is a Wad Ground Barn near Trafford Bridge over the Cherwell, and a draft agreement to grow woad refers to a barn and other buildings at Thrupp in the parish of Norton. But the milling equipment would normally be taken from one site to another, and the temporary mills could also be dismantled and re-erected elsewhere.

Pigot's Directory for 1830 gives some idea of how late woad continued to be grown in Northamptonshire. It says 'wood [sic] for dyers' use is cultivated in some parts'. Early 19th-century examples occur at Barton Seagrave, Daventry, Dodford, Maidwell, Watford and probably Brixworth, but by this period many woad-people were switching to other occupations such as weaving or shoemaking or moving to other counties, particularly to the Fens where the rich soils suited it so well.

Woad workers identified from genealogical sources
The original index of woad-people covered parishes mainly across the middle of the county. Many of the parishes lay in river valleys, those of the Welland and the Nene and its tributaries, and along the Watling Street. Of the 60 or so surnames in the original index, many are among the main recurring names, which have proved so useful in tracing families. Those names originating outside the county proved particularly helpful, e.g. Ablit, Davis, Howin, Jeacock, Lawson, Miland, Pickering, Powell, Thomas and Vines and their many variants. These could be looked up in indexes as a preliminary guide to further research.

Much information has come from Parish Registers, Bishops' Transcripts and Non-parochial Registers. People have expressed surprise that parish registers should include references to woad-people, but in fact many do so. A woadman may be described as such, sometimes in brackets, when other occupations are not mentioned. This may be

8. General View of the Agriculture of Buckinghamshire, Chapter 6, Crops Section, XXXIV.
9. NRO D3034.
to draw attention to the fact that the people did not belong to the parish and therefore could not claim a settlement there. There is a note in the Charwelton register in 1735 which says: ‘Here take note that no child was born at the woad, whilst it continued here: which I observe; that no person may hereafter demand a settlement in this parish upon that claim’.

There is great variety in the descriptions, which may begin with woad, wad(d), oade or the ambiguous ‘wood’ or occasionally ‘wod(d)’. One finds woad-cropper/dresser/gatherer/planter as well as retainer of the woad and references to woad grounds or woad cabbins. ‘Wood’ is sometimes found as a mistranscription for a less familiar ‘woad’ or ‘wodd’. The Upton-by-Northampton register is interesting in the variety of descriptions it contains: of Upton Oade ground, one of the wood [sic], wadfolk, wadman and woadwoman. Sojourners, travellers, vagrants and wandering people are other descriptions which may refer to woad-people. Sometimes one parson would list a number of woadmen, but his successor might use the term ‘sojourner’ or omit occupations altogether. Sometimes it is possible to deduce the occupation because of the surname or because it will be given against one infant baptism, but not against those of siblings or against the parents’ marriage. Even if no occupation is mentioned it is sometimes possible to recognise a period of woad-growing. Between 1765 and 1769, for example, the Guilsborough Bishops’ Transcripts mention the following couples: Robert and Mercy Jeacock, William and Charity Waples, John and Mary Pickering known to have been woad-people. Sometimes a register from another county will hold valuable information for identifying woad-people. For example, the Misterton, Leics, register has over 30 references to wad(d) workers before 1740, a number of whom appear later in Northamptonshire parishes. Even more valuable are three pages in the Burton Dassett, Warwicks, register (after burials for 1788), which are set aside for ‘people belonging to the woad’ and record 37 events between 1698 and 1712. Several relate to...
people who turn up in the mainly southern Northamptonshire parishes of Byfield, Blakesley, Courteenhall, Farthinghoe, Preston Deanery, Towcester and Whittle-bury, sometimes with no mention of occupation. This has proved a key document in increasing knowledge of the woad families around 1700 and earlier.

Copies of 18th-century Bishops’ Transcripts are on open shelves at the Northamptonshire Record Office and therefore convenient to use, but they sometimes contain less information than is in the original register. Recently in the Farthinghoe Bishops’ Transcripts I came across the baptisms of a number of children with ‘woad’ surnames, including Neal, Howen, Thomas and Vines and notably a Mercy Johnson, whose parents were not named, but the original register named the children’s parents and described them as ‘belonging to the woad.’ Mercy was the daughter of William and Mercy Johnson, of whom more anon. On the other hand, the Bishops’ Transcripts contained the burials of two infants or children called ‘a wad girle,’ not so described in the original register.

As I acquired more knowledge about woad, it became easier to select parishes to search. River valleys were a favoured area, as was the fenland around Peterborough. In the Welland valley near Market Harborough a correspondent tells me that woad plants are still to be found as a relic of former cropping. An article by David Hall, described as Superintendent of the Woad People in Wolfridge or Wolfage Park, and his family. We are told he was born in Thirnby (Thornby) and that his daughter Elizabeth was born in Little Billing. This information, more than is normally found in a register, was invaluable in reconstructing five generations of Francis Powell’s family and tracing their movements from one parish to another.

Once I became aware that woad could be used as part of a long rotation I found it was worth searching the same parish 15-20 years earlier and later than a known woad-growing period. Parishes where woad-people returned at such intervals include Brampton Ash, Barton Seagrave, Little Billing, Cottesbrooke, Dodford, Farthinghoe, Great Houghton, Maidwell, Moulton, Norton-by-Daventry, Pytchley, Thorpe, Upton-by-Northampton and Weston Favell.

Non-parochial registers for two Daventry churches both include references to Catesby and to known woad families, e.g. William (woadman) and Mary Burrows at the Independent Church and Francis and Rebecca Powell and Edward and Mary Ginns ‘of the Wad Cabbins Ketsby’ at the


11. NRO ML 380.
Wesleyan Church. Some descendants of woad-people have told me that their ancestors registered their children in Nonconformist churches wherever possible, for example at the Ashley and Wilbarston Independent Church.

Indexes of various kinds may give information about woad. The marriage licence index at the Northamptonshire Record Office sometimes gives occupations both of groom and bondsman which do not appear in the registers, for example Thomas Powell, wadman, at Weedon Bec, various members of the Davis family of Thornby, and Henry Pickering, wadman, who married at Peterborough St. John the Baptist in 1752 and later baptised a daughter there. This index can also help to trace families' movements. Joseph Vines of Moreton Pinkney married by licence at Harrington in 1707 and Thomas Vines 'of Hawes (Halse) in the parish of Brackley' married there by licence in 1709, with Joseph Vines, now of Market Overton, Rutland, as his bondsman. This led to the discovery of the baptism at Moreton Pinkney of Joseph Vines son of Richard and Jocaster in 1684 and the burial of Jocaster Vines 'woadwoman' in 1705 at Market Overton. The Northamptonshire Marriage Index has led to the location of marriages in parishes that might otherwise have not been searched. The IGI, though not giving occupations, can be used in conjunction with other sources to prepare for a visit to a Record Office.

**Other woad sources**

In 1992 Mrs. Eve McLoughlin sent me an image of large balls of woad pulp at Parson Drove, Cambs., in c.1910 (Cambridgeshire Libraries).
extract from the Buckinghamshire Quarter Sessions Records for 12th January 1726/7 which vividly illustrates the difficulties likely to be encountered by family historians trying to trace woadmen ancestors, particularly if the surname was a common one. William Johnson, his wife Mercy and their six named children were ordered to be removed from Haversham, near Newport Pagnell, to his birthplace in the sparsely-populated parish of Stuchbury near Brackley, a destination later changed to Brill, Bucks. ‘William Johnson, the father, aged about 54 years, had been born in Stuchbury Wadd Ground where his father lived and worked as a Wadder. He had been left an orphan at the age of about four years, and since then he had moved about the country, living in the counties of Buckingham, Northampton, Warwick and Bedford, following his father’s trade of a Wadder and living in a Wadd Cabin all the time. He, the said William Johnson, was baptised on 9th April 1671’. The Helmdon register records William’s birth at Stuchbury Wadd Ground and that of a brother a year earlier to George and Elizabeth Johnson. William and Mercy’s three youngest children were baptised at Haversham between 1723 and 1726, and recently I discovered the baptism of their daughter Mercy at Farthinghoe in 1721.

Mercy Johnson, the mother, had two children by a previous marriage and it seems likely that William had also been married before (the woadmen tended to marry at about 21). A William and Jane Johnson baptised daughters at Blakesley in 1697 and 1699, a daughter and son George at Burton Dassett (recorded in the woad pages) in 1701 and 1704 and a son William at Great Houghton in 1709.

On-going indexing of the Northamptonshire Poor Law Records by Dr. Christine Vialls has covered some woad families, including a Jeacock couple settled in Corby from nearby Desborough and a Removal Order of Robert and Elizabeth Holland from Great Harrowden to Cransley, in this case giving the names and ages of their several children. The Warwickshire Poor Law Index lists a Powell family moved from Fenny Compton, Warwicks, to Glendon in 1815. This turned out to be Francis Powell, grandson of the Superintendent at Brixworth, with his wife Rebecca and their six children, again with names and ages. One was baptised at Catesby in 1806 when woad is known to have been grown there.

A book by John Field\(^\text{13}\) of the English Place Name Society alerted me to the significance of field names as an indicator of former cropping. His examples include Wad Croft in Kettering, Wot Ground (Woad Ground in 1752) in Hardingstone, Wodel in Spratton (1717 constable’s accounts) and Woad Close at Upton (near Peterborough). Other examples have since come to light such as Woadhill in a Pailerspury terrier, a five-acre Woad Close at Pytchley, a Wat Ground at Cogenoe, a Woad Ground on the Manor Farm at Hulcote and Woad Cabbin Ground at Eye, near Peterborough, where Powder Blue Farm was also associated with woad-growing. Some of these closes were quite near the villages. In other cases woad was grown in sparsely-populated areas on the edge of a parish (e.g. Bluebarrow in Lamport, enclosed in 1576).

In the second half of the eighteenth century two rector of Weston Favell were enabled to rebuild the rectory and later extend it by letting the glebe land for woad, ‘which always produces an extraordinary rent for a time’.\(^\text{14}\) An earlier rector, in the 1730s, had also let his glebe land for woad, as had Mr Ekins, lord of the manor in the 1740s. Obviously some landowners were satisfied with having woad on their land, and probably recommended it to their neighbours. It is interesting to note that Francis Powell (the future Superintendent) was able to move between the adjacent parishes of Little Billing, Weston Favell, Abington, Moulton and Brixworth, all in the Northampton area, between 1742 and his

death in 1772.

The Bishops’ Transcripts for Desborough and Hardingstone contain no references to woad, but *A History of Desborough* by J. R. Moore, printed by the author in 1810, tells us that ‘Wad or woad … was grown rather extensively during the 18th century in the eastern part of the parish, adjoining the Ise brook.’ The 1854 *Northamptonshire Glossary, Vol II*, by Anne Elizabeth Baker, says ‘Within memory there were wad-grounds in Hardingstone field and some of the neighbouring villages, with huts for the wad-men.’ In *Memorials of Old Northamptonshire*, edited by Alice Dryden, 1903, it is noted that: ‘In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, there were still ‘wad grounds’ round Hardingstone and huts which the wadders lived in during the summer …’

So far I have done only a limited amount of research among estate papers, but these would obviously be a source of further information about woad. The Northamptonshire Record Office holds an agreement of 1749 between Edward Davis, woadman, and John Ashley, lord of the manor of Ashby St. Ledgers, who was also a woollen draper in London, to grow woad on named fields in the lord’s demesne. There is a similar agreement between Edward Davis and the vicar of Ashby. The references to woad-people in the parish register correspond to the initial four-year period for which the agreements were to run. There is also a rough draft agreement of 1753 between Joseph Clarke Esq of Welton and Edward Davis of Thornby, woadman, to grow woad at Thrupp in the parish of Norton.15 The Isham of Lamport papers include references to woad mills and cabins and to woad being grown at Bluebarrow and in other named closes. Philip Riden, whilst working on the Victoria County History, has found references to woad in the Towcester area around 1700 among Fermor estate papers, and at Blisworth in 1726 in Grafton estate papers. These references tie in with events in the parish registers.

15. NRO D3034

A Year-round or Seasonal Occupation?

The suggestion that woad cabins were used only in the summer, which was also made earlier by Celia Fiennes, is probably misleading. We learn that the woad-people at Newport Pagnell remained as a colony for four years and that the wadder William Johnson had lived the whole of his 54 years in a wadd cabin. The actual work was almost year-round, with the couching being done in the winter. However, woad was known as a labour-intensive crop which could provide work for the poor. It was estimated that one acre provided work for four people during the busy weeding and picking season. Joan Thirsk has discovered that at a 41-acre site at Milcote, near Stratford-on-Avon, in 1626-27, about 224 men, women and young people were employed on weeding in May, 249 on weeding and picking in June, and over 100 in each of the following three months. These people were brought in daily from neighbouring villages and from Stratford. It seems likely that something similar happened in Northamptonshire, with towns such as Northampton, Rothwell and Daventry providing seasonal labour for neighbouring woad-grounds.

Who Were the Woad-people?

Peggy Edmond eventually traced her Jeacock ancestors to younger sons of younger sons *ad infinitum* of a land-owning Warwickshire family. Other woad-people such as the Pickerings may have come into the business from a similar background, perhaps initially in an entrepreneurial capacity. Some signed their marriage licence bonds as yeomen and yet appear in registers as of a particular woad-ground. Some were members of dyeing families. Others may have come from areas such as Wales where there was not enough work locally. Whatever their origin, there is ample evidence that some families stayed in the industry for long periods, passing on their acquired skills from one generation to another, and thus making it possible to use family-history methods to reconstruct families and trace their movements and so
identify the location of woad-growing.

For anyone wanting more information on individual families or parishes, my Woad – Index 1 contains over 2,000 events extracted from parish registers and other sources, and formed into a database for me by Kay Collins of the NFHS, together with an introduction and notes on individual parishes. It covers 70 Northamptonshire parishes, still mainly across the middle of the county. Copies are at the Northamptonshire Record Office and with the NFHS. I am currently working on a second index, which will include parishes in Kings Sutton Hundred and elsewhere in the south of the county. If anyone comes across references to woad or woad-people in the future, I shall be grateful if they will pass them on to me.

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Although Sir Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF) has been the subject of significant research, historians have tended to concentrate on the national leadership of the BUF or their activities in major cities. In contrast, the part that the Blackshirts played in the life of towns like Northampton has been more or less ignored or accorded only passing reference.¹ What follows is an account of the creation and struggle of a Blackshirt branch and its relations to a local body politic which it tried, and failed, to penetrate.

Of the three county towns to host a BUF branch, Northampton was, at least initially, the least enthusiastic. Wellingborough had its Blackshirts a month after Mosley had launched the movement in London in October 1932, and in Peterborough a short lived BUF branch was established in June the following year.² Travelling speaker Brown held the first fascist meeting in Northampton’s Market Square that Autumn and a local branch was established.³ But then, silence. A letter to the *Chronicle and Echo* noted the contradiction between the ‘lethargy of local Fascists’ and their ‘Market Square eloquence’ which claimed that ‘Fascism has come to stay in Northampton’.⁴ This letter evoked no response and the highest estimate of BUF membership for the town was four in 1934, indicating that fascism had failed to take root. While elsewhere, the support given by Lord Rothermere’s press was sending people flocking to the BUF such that the movement reached its numerical high-point in the region of 50,000 in the first half of 1934, Northampton merely looked on.⁵ Nonetheless, it was during this period that the Blackshirts made a significant local recruit when 22 year old Harry Frisby defected from the Conservative’s Junior Imperial League. By class and politics Frisby was typical of the so-called ‘Rothermere’ fascists for whom the BUF represented a more ‘virile’ form of Conservatism. The son of the owner of the Brook Manufacturing Company in the town and an old boy of Northampton Town and County School, Frisby was on the fringe of the town elite. At the time of his selection as a BUF prospective parliamentary candidate for Watford and Harrow, the *Northampton Independent* described him as a ‘young and energetic Northamptonian’ with ‘many qualifications’ for that post.⁶

With the appointment of Frisby as local Branch Organiser and a meeting at The School, Weedon in early 1935, came a

renewed assault on local indifference. Meetings were held on the Market Square and Blackshirt claimed that the branch was ‘growing steadily’. A sign that a toehold in the town had been gained was the small headquarters opened in Hunter Street near the town centre. Then, indicating that the BUF were serious in their efforts to bring fascism to the town, Mosley came to speak at the Guildhall in July.

‘Mosley Speaks’
‘Despite the fine weather and the demand of 2s 6d for the front seats’, 500 people attended the meeting. With Blackshirts as sentinels down the sides of the hall Mosley marched to the dais to the strains of amplified ‘martial music’ to stand alone with ‘a silver buckle the only relief to his all black uniform, at the foot of a gigantic Union Jack which stretched from the platform almost to the lofty roof. … On each side of the platform were the fasces – the Fascist symbols’. Mosley’s address showed that the BUF was by no means oblivious to the place of the boot and shoe industry in the town’s fortunes. Speaking on the ‘great Northampton industry’, Mosley pointed out that the export trade for footwear had ‘practically vanished’ and promised ‘a home market as a substitute for foreign trade’ via empire autarchy. These were themes that fascist speakers would return to in the coming years and, in the event of the establishment of the fascist corporate state, the BUF expected that the ‘administrative centre’ for the ‘Leather Trades Corporation’ would be in Northampton. After L’Estrange Malone, the Labour prospective parliamentary candidate for Northampton, drew for his Labour audience ‘a picture of the shoe union officers of Northampton shot or in prison, with Fascist officials issuing orders from the office of No.1 and No.2 Branches’, a ‘Local Fascist’ suggested that he was ‘undoubtedly correct in his assumption that Sir Oswald Mosley’s stalwarts will eventually relieve the Boot and Shoe Union official of the duties of leading, or misleading the workers.’

Apart from Mosley’s reply to a question on BUF policy regarding the Jews – probably asked on the initiative of the Liberal Councillor Saul Doffman who had written to the Board of Deputies for advice – which caused a ‘brief outburst from the back of the hall’, the press recorded that Mosley enjoyed ‘an enthusiastic reception’ and ‘seemed to make a most favourable impression’. “At the close of his hour’s address there was loud and prolonged applause.” Underlining this success, the counter meeting organised by the Trades Council, although ‘well attended’, attracted ‘fewer than at the Mosley meeting.’

In view of this positive reception, it is not surprising that the local branch grew. ‘Northampton has benefited considerably from the Leader’s recent visit, and excellent progress has been made. Membership has increased by nearly 50 per cent. Open-air meetings are now being held regularly, and future prospects are bright’ it was claimed. Meetings continued on the Market Square, particularly stressing the BUF’s message of ‘minding Britain’s business’ in the matter of Italian ambitions in Abyssina. At the end of the year things were lively enough to justify advertising a district dance at the Village Hall at Yardley Hastings in the fascist press. This trend carried on to make 1936 a year in which, the Northampton Labour Party reported, ‘Fascist activity increased considerably.’

9. NCE, 4 July 1935.
11. NCE, 19 February 1934, p.4
13. NCE, 4 July 1935.
14. NI, 12 July 1935.
As has been noted elsewhere, the quality of leadership of provincial BUF branches was at the centre of their fortunes. In this respect, it was during the first half of 1936 that Northampton BUF made perhaps its most important recruit in George C., who soon became District Leader and the driving force of local fascism. Describing his ‘conversion’, GC recorded that ‘keenly interested in political subjects’ he had often ‘spent a pleasant half-hour … standing on the Market Square … listening to the doctrines expounded by the various speakers’. Although sometimes heckling Blackshirt speakers he was also ‘struck by their patriotic outlook’, ‘greatly impressed by their policy of ‘Britain First’ and the way in which they championed the small trader’ and ‘impressed, as a soldier, by the way in which the National Anthem was sung after each meeting.’ Although describing himself as ‘brought up in Conservatism’ GC was in all other respects quite different from Frisby. Born and bred a cockney, GC had served as a private soldier in the Northamptonshire Regiment in the Twenties and then stayed in Northampton to work in the goods section at the town’s Castle railway station. He was also, and continued to be, a member of the National Union of Railwaymen who sat on its local committee.

An energetic force for fascism, another blackshirt wrote of GC that ‘It’s no good seeking him at the HQ at the week-ends, you will find him on the main street selling literature.’ By the Summer the district was

19. NJ, 22 October 1937.

Figure 1: A graphic view of Northampton politics from the Northampton Mercury and Herald, 30th October 1936
appearing regularly as second in the country in the BUF paper sales league. ‘It’s all up with Northampton – sales up – recruits up – and the Red Front with the wind up’ Blackshirt claimed.20

The ‘Battle of Cable Street’: A Provincial Echo

This last comment suggests that, as was happening in the East End of London – the so-called ‘Battle of Cable Street’ occurred at the same time – fascism aroused anti-fascism and brought violence from both sides. If anything, arrangements in the Market Square tended to encourage things to move in that direction, as the established orator’s platform – the steps of the Square’s ornate cast iron fountain – allowed fascist and anti-fascist speakers to address simultaneous meetings. On several consecutive Sunday evenings in September and October the throwing of fruit and insults and the jostling of the departing blackshirts was only prevented from becoming more serious by Chief Constable Williamson’s officers. Meetings were then banned until Williamson called together representatives of the BUF; Labour, the Communist Party and the National Unemployed Workers Movement to make them agree to use the Square on a rota basis.21

Following these incidents, the local press expressed what it no doubt believed should be the opinion of right-thinking Northamptonians on the BUF. On the one hand, it noted that ‘there have been doctrines preached on the Market Square … far more challenging to popular opinion than anything heard from Northampton Fascists’ and yet during the ‘most stormy political episodes of the past, the rights of assembly and free speech have been protected’. However, on the other, while defending the core liberal value of free speech for the fascists, the *Chronicle and Echo*’s sympathies were with the forces of law and order: ‘Blackshirts or red shirts, there is still a very real respect in Northampton for the men in blue’ the paper concluded.22 A cartoon (see above) which appeared shortly before the municipal elections made clear where these angry voices from the fountain steps stood in relation to the dominant ideal of shared prosperity and gradual progress.

Vôte Fascist?

Despite anti-fascist opposition in Northampton and elsewhere, Mosley was back in the Guildhall again that November to hold another successful and well attended meeting; the local Labour Party reported that ‘Mosley packed the Town Hall’.23 At the end of his address – this time principally on BUF foreign policy – the fascist leader announced that Northampton was one of the hundred constituencies that the movement planned to contest in a general election.

Had an election been called in 1939 or 1940 the BUF candidate would have been Mrs Nora Elam whose appointment caused the local press to comment that while ‘Northampton’s Parliamentary elections in the past have been repeatedly distinguished by strange candidatures’, ‘few have occasioned more initial surprise’ than this one.24 One of several former suffragettes who joined the BUF; Elam stated that ‘she wanted to understand the Northampton people’ and that ‘she was sincere in her desires that … conditions should be bettered in this great industrial town of Britain.’ If Northamptonians should elect her, Elam promised a ‘great national resurgence of our race’ which would save the town’s ‘staple industry.’ Referring to the town’s famous ‘free thinker’ and MP, Elam suggested that ‘this revolution in political thought’ was,

21. *Daily Worker*, 3 October 1936; *NI*, 23 October 1936; *NCE*, 28 September 1936, 19 October 1936, 20 October 1936, 24 October 1936; *Northampton Mercury and Herald* (*NMH*), 2 October 1936; NRO, NLPI, Executive Committee meeting, 3 November 1936; NRO NBC31/5, Watch Committee minutes 1927–37, meeting 19 October 1936.
23. NRO, ZB49/12, 1936 Agent’s Report: Annual Meeting 11 February 1937.
most specially suited’ to Northampton, for – ‘from the time of Bradlaugh …, it has shown a spirit of sturdy independence in keeping with British Union principles.’ Although the BUF’s claim that ‘the people had taken her to their hearts’ was dubious, the press discussed the possibility of a BUF candidate splitting the Conservative vote should an election be called following the coronation of King George VI.

A more reliable indicator of likely fascist electoral fortunes was provided the following year by GC’s candidature in Castle Ward. In the leading story on the front page of the Chronicle and Echo, Frisby suggested that meetings on The Mayorhold in the ward – where GC lived – had shown the ‘people who assembled there to be the most sympathetic’. At one of GC’s campaign meetings, where the local press recorded an attendance of over 500 people, fascist speakers ‘expressed the need for action with regard to slum clearance’, a not inappropriate message in an area described as ‘the oldest and most slummy district’ of the town. The Chronicle and Echo commented that the performance of the town’s first fascist candidate would ‘be followed with close interests’.

Despite the BUF’s ability to draw an audience to its meetings, GC achieved only a ‘humble 27 votes’ in a three way contest. Despite this, the BUF continued to concentrate on Castle Ward and, in 1938, moved its headquarters and book shop to The Mayorhold, close to GC’s home. That year GC again decided to fight ‘Northampton’s strongest Labour ward’ and his election address argued for a ‘Britain first’ policy and the protection of the boot and

29. NCE, 2 November 1937.
However, even in a straight fight between the BUF and the Labour party little more support was forthcoming and, with Labour’s vote identical to that of the previous year, GC’s share only climbed to 59 votes. Mrs Adams’ victory speech made clear that ‘Labour has shown Fascism where it gets off’.

Outsiders
Unlike at Eye in Suffolk where the local squire was elected as a BUF councillor in 1938, in Northampton the Blackshirts were outside the local structure of status and authority. Not only were the BUF attempting to introduce a foreign form of politics into a community with a strong culture of local patriotism and identity and a corresponding distrust of ‘outsiders’, but also they had little to offer. Unlike in similarly run-down working class areas in the East End of London where the BUF had managed to secure as much as 23 per cent of the vote in local elections in 1937, Castle Ward had no tradition of anti-Semitism to exploit. Whereas the decline of the textile industries in the North provided a limited platform for the Blackshirts, in Northampton the interests of the boot and shoe industry in relation to, for example, the threat posed by Bata, were already articulated at local level. Finally, as Marie Dickie has also shown, Northampton already its own local version of the ‘corporate state’.

However, despite not having achieved anything approaching a mass base in Northampton, the town nonetheless hosted a viable and active fascist outpost in the later 1930s. Apart from the effect of Mosley’s meetings, GC was assisted in the building of the branch by Tommy Moran, a powerful mob orator and – on account of his fighting prowess at the ‘Battle of Cable Street’ – a blackshirt hero, who was posted to Northampton in 1937. Through these efforts the BUF in the latter part of the decade built up a subscribing membership in the region of seventy persons, of whom ten or so formed the vital activist core of the branch.

Given the unpromising political terrain, the question should perhaps not be ‘why did the blackshirts not gain more support?’ but rather ‘how could they gain any following at all?’ Some clues are offered by the nature of the activist core of the branch. They were all young people in their twenties – GC, twenty-nine when he joined, was the oldest. In terms of their socio-economic background, unlike Frisby, they came from the lower middle and the skilled working classes. George Sanders was a painter who, like GC, worked on the railways; FS and Harold Osborn were both shop keepers, the latter running a cycle shop on the Kettering road; Len Manning was employed as an electrician by the local electricity company; PW was a clerk in the Public Assistance department; his brother WW, and Ron Huff were, like a number of local members, engineering workers at the Express Lifts Company; Harry Loasby worked for the Brook Manufacturing Company. From these details it is clear that the BUF, for all its attempts to address the concerns of boot and shoe workers, failed to recruit from the predominant section of the town’s working class.

31. NCE, 31 October 1938.
32. Results in 1937: Roberts (Lab.) 1191, Wilson (Cons.) 993, GC (BUF) 27. Results in 1938: Adams (Lab.) 1191, GC (BUF) 59 (NMH, 4 November 1938).
33. NCE, 2 November 1938.
38. Taped interviews with PW, District Treasurer, Northampton BUF, ca.1936-9, 17 May 1997 and 4 November 1997 (TIPW).
class. Also of significance is the degree to which the Northampton blackshirts were more or less recent migrants to the town. GC, Deputy District Leader Ron Huff and his brother Frank and sister Violet – both also activists – came originally from what became BUF East End strongholds, respectively, Bethnal Green and Limehouse. The parents of District Treasurer, PW and his brother W also hailed from London where PW was born. Young enough not to have deeply ingrained political allegiances, occupationally and often geographically outside the cultural and corporate arrangements of the local polity, they were a narrow section of the local population to whom the BUF could appeal.

Fascist Activism
Something else shared by a number of the blackshirts was that they were also leading members of the Invicta Road (cycle) Club in Northampton. Among the promises of the fascist utopia were abundant facilities for sport and recreation and the BUF’s Action was recruited to the club’s campaign to interest the Borough Council in the provision of a cycle track. Castigating ‘Northampton’s Armchair Administrators’ for their decision to spend £11,000 on a new crematorium rather than £3,000 on sports facilities, the fascists noted Northampton’s ‘tremendous new fire station’ and ‘remarkable new indoor swimming baths’ and urged the ‘young and energetic [Tory] councillor named Harrison’ to raise the matter again.

However, Northampton BUF’s campaigns over the remaining years of the decade were rarely so uncontroversial. To the fore in their efforts was the BUF’s call to the Government to ‘Mind Britain’s Business’ rather than oppose the aggression of the fascist states. This did not displace other aspects of BUF propaganda – its corporate state and anti-Semitism – rather all these areas of fascist ideology were interrelated.

‘Mind Britain’s Business’


Norah Elam, speaking to the League of Nations Union in Northampton in 1937 condemned ‘collective security’ as meaning ‘collective war’ and instead stressed fascist isolationism. The next year when Nazi ambitions concerning Czechoslovakia were becoming apparent, the same policy caused ‘a number of young fascists’ to disrupt a Northampton League of Nations Union meeting where Eleanor Rathbone MP was speaking. A ‘stink bomb’ saturated the venue with a ‘disgusting odour’ and, reflecting the BUF’s nationalism and isolationist stance, calls of ‘Britons fight for Britons only’ and ‘Why look abroad so much when we have one and half millions unemployed at home?’ were heard in the hall. Later that year, after the occupation of the Sudetenland, the British Union Book Club – presumably a local fascist alternative to the town’s Left Book Club – issued a resolution to Labour prospective parliamentary candidate Reginald Paget, calling on him to ‘oppose vigorously any attempt to send funds abroad to the poor Czechs, or Spaniards, until every man and woman in Great Britain is removed from poverty’.

The report on the Rathbone meeting also noted that “Britain First’ was the burden of the heckling as it is of their wall slogans’, a reference to local manifestations of a nationwide campaign of ‘fascist graffiti’. Reports at the time included cases of slogans on the walls of the churchyard of St. Andrews church and another Northamptonian took offence at seeing the inscription ‘Hail Mosley!’ on The Mounts. A letter to Northampton Trades Council complained of ‘the amount of Fascist propaganda that is being chalked in all parts of the town’. Neither was this an exclusively urban activity. One correspondent railed against those who encouraged ‘youths to creep about in the night and spoil the natural beauty of our countryside’, and another complained of ‘Britain First’ inscribed on ‘railway bridges and canal bridges’.

During one such nocturnal expedition GC and Len Manning were caught by a passing policeman at the moment of adding the final touches to the slogan ‘Mosley Says Britain First’ painted in six foot high letters on the wall of Towcester racecourse – the property of Lord Hesketh. After a struggle in which Manning was injured, the two managed to reach Frisby’s waiting car and escape. But, the vehicle’s registration number having been taken, they were later arrested. While their ‘previous good character’ was taken into account both received heavy fines and were bound-over.

BUF activity continued into 1939 with a call to arms for a ‘Spring Campaign’ in February and Mosley’s third and final visit to the town hall in April. Despite Hitler having violated the Munich agreement and the increasing likelihood of war, the fascist leader again drew ‘a big audience’ to hear his arguments against British involvement in a European conflict. Standing alone on the dais with the BUF circle-flash emblem in front of him and behind what the Chronicle and Echo’s reporter described as ‘the biggest Union jack I have ever seen’, Mosley ‘exuded virility from his whole six feet’. ‘By rhetoric rather that logic … he held his audience for ninety minutes’, the report continued.

‘An occurrence of perverted originality’

As part of his address, Mosley condemned ‘attempts … to poison the minds of the British people in order to build up a war spirit, which would eventually lead to a world conflict for the benefit of international finance’. In fascist thinking ‘international finance’ was synonymous with Jewry and

41. NRO, ZB49/11, cutting circa. March 1937
42. Wellingborough News and Northamptonshire Advertiser, 3 June 1938.
43. NCE, 5 November 1938.
44. NCE, 20 September 1937, 19 March 1938, 9 June 1939; NRO, NTC28, Correspondence Received 1937-38, undated [1938] letter from W. T. Jackson; NRO, NTC7, Minutes 1936-1947, meeting 20 April 1938.
45. NMH, 13 April 1938.
46. Action, 18 February 1939, 4 March 1939, 18 May 1939.
47. NCE, 18 April 1939.
48. Ibid.
fascist anti-Semitism remorselessly attacked the Jews on this account. With one of the smallest Jewish communities in the country – less than a hundred persons whose synagogue on Overstone Road had been established in 1890 – and experiencing, as was noted a few years later, ‘little if any, active anti-Semitism’, Northampton was an unlikely target for such propaganda. Nonetheless, East-end tactics were to be inflicted on Northampton.

Back in 1937, Moran, writing under the title ‘Wake Up, Northampton’, noted that although the ‘only’ Jews Northamptonians came across were ‘the usual Jewish nomads who monopolise nearly every stall on the open market’, he sought to link Jewry to the town’s economic anxieties, writing that ‘the housewife of Northampton … buys foreign shoes in the Jewish chain stores, and so keeps her husband out of employment.’ ‘Once again’, Moran argued, ‘the Jew grows fat upon exploitation of our people’s poverty.’ From the fountain steps only yards from Saul Doffman’s shop on the corner, a visiting speaker pursued a similar theme, declaring that ‘thanks to international finance, Northampton’s boot and shoe operatives were now at the mercy of the huge Bata concern.’ Writing under the title ‘Jews in Northampton’, Moran found an example of Jewish ‘bitterness’ in the experience of a local woman blackshirt forced to wait half-an-hour in a Jewish owned hairdressers only to be refused service. Reflecting yet another dimension of anti-Semitism, GC denounced the effects of the ‘cheap-jack sordid methods of ‘slick’ aliens’ on British ‘culture’ and blamed the Jews for ‘the white slave traffic, dope peddling, filthy literature and undesirable establishments’. The intention of the BUF was to ‘destroy these bad influences’ he wrote.

As war came closer Northampton BUF found grounds for complaint in the treatment of Jewish refugees, a number of whom had been received by the town. One letter in early 1939 showed the way in which the branch’s efforts to cultivate Castle ward could intersect with anti-Semitism. The correspondent, having thanked the Blackshirts for their kindness in organising the New Year’s party for the poorer children of Castle Ward’ commented that it was ‘about time someone thought about the local girls and boys instead of the foreign refugees’. In another letter, Ron Huff condemned the ‘enormous amounts … being found for the benefit of the alien refugee’. The fascist principle was that ‘charity starts at home’ and Huff announced that the fascists were arranging ‘a day’s outing’ for the ‘less fortunate children of Castle Ward’.

The following month anti-Semitic words were matched by action. The Northampton Independent reported ‘an occurrence of perverted originality … unprecedented locally’ and asked ‘who is the perverted fanatic who in outrageous mockery hung a pig’s head dripping with blood, above the door of the Northampton Synagogue in Overstone Road’. Although there is no direct link between the BUF and this act, similar occurrences were taking place all over the East End at the same time, which Linehan has interpreted as evidence of the increasing ferocity of the BUF anti-Jewish campaign as war came closer. Reflecting this linkage of Jewry to the slide to war, letters from local fascists claimed that a war against Germany would serve the ‘vendetta

51. The number of aliens of Austrian and German nationality registered in the borough of Northampton was 20 in 1937, increasing to 29 in 1938. In 1939 this figure increased to 100 (County Borough of Northampton, Annual Report of the Chief Constable for the year ended December 31st, 1937, (Northampton, 1938); idem., Annual Report (etc.), (Northampton, 1939); idem., Annual Report (etc.), (Northampton, 1940); NI, 3 March 1939.
52. NCE, 10 January 1939, 20 May 1939; see also NCE, 21 December 1938, 14 January 1939, 20 January 1939.
53. NI, 9 June 1939.
of the Chosen Race’ and that press ‘war mongering’ was the responsibility of ‘World Jewry’. Reports also appeared in the same month of ‘numerous walls…smeared with marks representing the letters ‘P’ and ‘J’ (Perish Judah) and ‘Mosley is winning’ around the nearby village of Sywell.55

The Link

A further expression of the local fascists’ opposition to a war against Germany was their involvement with the Anglo-German Link, an ostensibly non-political organisation established by Admiral Sir Barry Domville, whose real purpose was to foster positive opinion about Nazi Germany. Blackshirts, possibly including Frisby who had belonged to the town’s Anglo-German circle and had enthused about Germany in the local press, were among the audience of over 50 at the local branch’s inaugural meeting at the Wedgewood Cafe in Abington Street in May 1939.56 A base was established at the office of Maurice Smith, a local travel agent, who acted as branch secretary. Outside his office, in Mercers Row, a poster with Domville’s portrait advertised the objects of the organisation to passers-by. Progress was made with membership rising to 50, and a further meeting was held at which ‘a German count’ spoke.57

However, the Link was not a fascist initiative but rather an episode where, for once, the purposes of the BUF and the local elites overlapped. At the end of the preceding year canvassing gathered together around 30 persons who shared, for various reasons, an interest in improved Anglo-German relations. Prominent among them were the manufacturer and Labour councillor Wenman J. Bassett-Lowke and Captain George Drummond. Chairman of the London branch of the Royal Bank of Scotland – Drummond’s Bank – and host to both the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York at Pitsford Hall, his county home, a former High Sheriff of Northamptonshire, twice president of Northampton Agricultural Society and president of Northamptonshire Cricket Club for five years, the Captain was in the top rank of the county elite.58 Bassett-Lowke – who was also on the Link’s National Council – became the chairman of the local branch and Drummond its president.

In August, with war every day becoming more likely, the Home Secretary identified the Link as a Nazi propaganda organisation in the House of Commons. Among the repercussions of this were that St. George’s ward Labour Party decided not to accept Bassett-Lowke for the forthcoming local government elections because they feared that he ‘was pro-Nazi’. Bassett-Lowke resigned from his position in the Link and what had been developing into an acrimonious row was patched up.59 Assessing Bassett-Lowke’s political sympathies I think it is probable that his business links and general intellectual sympathies predisposed him to be pro-German but not pro-Nazi. Even so, his attendance at a meeting organised by Mosley at the Criterion restaurant in London in March 1940 – where the fascist leader denounced the conflict as a ‘Jews’ War’ – suggests, at best, a dangerous level of political naiveté.60

Regarding Drummond’s motivations there are no such ambiguities. Domville described Drummond as ‘madly pro-German and anti-Jew’ and although there is no evidence of any connection between Drummond and the BUF locally he was a sympathiser and minor financial supporter of the BUF nationally and attended Mosley’s 1939 rally at Earls Court. He also locally

55. NCE, 25 May 1939, 9 June 1939, 22 June 1939.
57. NI, 11 August 1939, 23 June 1939.
58. NI, November 1963.
60. NI, 24 March 1937; NCE, 15 June 1938, 7 November 1938; Richard Griffiths, Patriotism Perverted: Captain Ramsay, The Right Club and British Anti-Semitism, (London, 1998), pp.41, 229
sought to found his own fascistic organisation, ‘The British Movement’ and was active in the ‘All-British Association’.\textsuperscript{61}

The \textit{Northampton Independent} commented of Captain Drummond that his ‘patriotic record’ was ‘abundantly sufficient to absolve him from knowingly participating in any movement of pro-Nazi character’.\textsuperscript{62} As Richard Griffiths has shown, patriotism in the 1939–40 period could have unexpected outcomes, including agitation which was ultimately in the favour of Nazi Germany. In this respect the Northampton Blackshirts were no doubt as patriotic as Drummond.

\textbf{War}

Although the Link was wound up at the outbreak of hostilities, anti-war agitation continued. Drummond was active in The Right Club of Captain Ramsey, MP, which was devoted to opposing what it saw as a ‘Jewish’ war and was involved with Mosley’s anti-war activities in 1940. Home Intelligence also recorded Drummond’s involvement with a group of prominent anti-Semites which included General J. F. C. Fuller, at one time a leading member of the BUF, and Philip Farrer, a friend of Mosley.\textsuperscript{63}

Changing their slogan from ‘Mind Britain’s Business’ to ‘Stop the War’ the BUF also continued to campaign nationally. However, Northampton branch received a body blow when GC was recalled to the Northamptonshire regiment. His deputy, Ron Huff – a member of the same regiment – almost certainly left the scene at the same time. After Huff and GC’s departure a Londoner, Peter Farmer, took over.\textsuperscript{64} It is possible that some disillusionment may have also set in at this time among blackshirts.

WW, who served in the same battalion as Huff, wrote to me: ‘Youthful, naïve and ignorant, I anticipated none of this. I imagined Hitler to be idealistic and benificent. … I began to have doubts when Prague went under. As German troops poured into Poland, the scales fell from my eyes.\textsuperscript{65} Nonetheless, there were still recruits to be made and, in a letter to \textit{Action}, a Northampton woman who had recently joined, wrote of having lost a husband and brother in the Great War and of her fears for her ‘young (and only) son’.\textsuperscript{66}

Thus, although much weakened the Blackshirts continued to operate until the war situation radically altered with the Nazi blitzkrieg in the West. Reflecting a country gripped by the fear of being undermined from within, under the title ‘Out with the Quislings’, \textit{Northampton Independent} warned its readers of ‘peculiar people whose perverted instincts turn them against their own country’, who ‘when the time comes to garner the fruits of intrigue and espionage’ would ‘become the tools of invaders’.\textsuperscript{67}

In the midst of this heated atmosphere the Government acted. Under regulation 18b of the Defence (General) Regulations persons adjudged to be a threat to security could be detained without trial and it was at this time that Drummond announced that, as he was unable to ‘fit’ himself ‘in any longer with life as it is lived in the average English community’, he was moving to the Isle of Man. The local press cryptically suggested that his ‘extreme views upon many aspects of modern British political, economic and industrial organisation’ lay behind this. Leslie Hamson, an associate and fellow member of the Link, recalled calling at Pitsford Hall and finding Drummond under interrogation by detectives. Things were serious enough for the Captain to take Hamson on one side to give him a thousand pounds in cash with the instruction to look after his family ‘if I go inside’.\textsuperscript{68}

Possibly Drummond’s self-exile

61. Griffiths, \textit{Patriotism Perverted}, pp.41, 63, 139, 173, 217; TIPW, 4 November 1997; information from Mosley’s long time secretary Jeffery Hamm (email from John Hope, 9 April 1999); NI, 13 July 1934, NCE, 10 March 1938, 15 March 1939.

62. NI, 11 August 1939.


64. NCE, 22 August 1939, 26 August 1939; TIPW, 17 May 1997; NCE, 15 August 1939; Action, 26 October 1939.


66. \textit{Action}, 5 October 1939.

67. NI, 24 May 1940.
may have been pressed on him as an alternative to internment.

However, despite news of the arrest between 23rd and 27th May of many leading fascists including Mosley and Norah Elam, in Northampton Peter Farmer continued to be active.\(^6^9\) He recalled that on 29th May a man visited District HQ and showed him a leaflet promoting the ‘peace views’ of Alexander Hancock, a shoe manufacturer who lived in Great Billing near Northampton. A pacifist after his war service, Hancock, although not holding with all aspects of BUF thinking, took its paper.\(^7^0\)

His leaflet called for those of a like mind to assemble in the ‘Market Square for a quarter of an hour and then walk away quietly’ as a protest.

Farmer agreed to help and that night leaflets were distributed to local factories. Some leaflets were also thrown at an army sentry who followed Farmer and his accomplice and, either that night or the following morning, the police raided the fascist HQ and made arrests. Also around this time police swooped on local members and questioned them and searched their homes for suspicious material, although no one was detained.\(^7^1\) Initially released, Hancock and Farmer were re-arrested on instruction from the Director of Public Prosecutions in London and found guilty and sentenced to three months imprisonment for ‘endeavouring to cause a person in his Majesty’s service disaffection likely to lead to a breach of his duty’.\(^7^2\) Like Drummond, Farmer spent much of the war on the Isle of Man, although in his case interned behind barbed wire.\(^7^3\)

In this way the fascist struggle in Northampton came to an end. While never finding the conditions to prosper, GC and his fellow activists never rested in their attempts to press their cause, always hoping to emulate the success of the fascist movements on the Continent. Although equipped with a policy for Northampton, they never managed to penetrate a local body politic which rejected, indeed could scarcely understand, revolutionary politics of either left or right.

Acknowledgement
My thanks go to Marie Dickie for reading and commenting on this article.

68. NI, 10 May 1940; Leslie E. Hamson, Lessons of Life, (privately published, 1979), pp.54-5.
69. NGE, 23 May 1940, 24 May 1940, 25 May 1940, 27 May 1940.
70. NET, 21 June 1940.
71. TIPW, 17 May 1997.
72. NET, 21 June 1940; News Chronicle, 22 June 1940.
On 18th May 1979 there was a brief announcement on the lunch-time news that Yardley Chase, part of the plateau which lies between the Nene and the Great Ouse, was one of six sites being considered as the possible location for a third London Airport. I remember the shock, the sheer unbelief with which I heard this announcement. As a relative newcomer to the area, I knew nothing about the events leading up to this announcement, or that Thurleigh, just across the county boundary in Bedfordshire, and Cublington near Leighton Buzzard in Buckinghamshire, had been similarly threatened about a decade earlier when the Roskill Commission was investigating possible sites for a third London Airport. Along with Thurleigh and Cublington, Roskill considered sites at Foulness and Nuthampstead (near Royston). Their Report, published in December 1970, recommended Cublington, though Colin Buchanan issued a minority Report in favour of Foulness.

Foulness was in fact accepted by the Heath government and a Maplin Development Authority was set up to research the possibilities and problems of the site. But – as many will recall – the early 1970s were a period of extraordinary economic upheaval with massive increases in oil prices leading to recession and also inflation. Following the election of a Labour government in early 1974, Maplin as a possible third London Airport was cancelled chiefly because there were grave doubts about the forecast increase in passenger numbers and whether a third London Airport was really necessary at all.

But the problem – or rather the perception of a problem – did not go away and in August 1978, the Secretary of State for Trade announced the appointment of two committees, the Advisory Committee on Airports Policy and the Study Group on South East Airports, to consider the long-term options for handling air traffic in the south of England. It was the latter group which let it be known that Yardley Chase was on their list of possible sites on 18th May 1979. The other sites being considered were Huggleston (close to Roskill’s Cublington), Langley (Roskill’s Nuthampstead), Stansted, and Foulness/Maplin. In addition two new sites were to be considered, Willingale (near Chelmsford) and Yardley Chase. Arguably Yardley Chase was the substitute for Roskill’s Thurleigh. The announcement on 18th May 1979 should not perhaps have come as such a surprise.

The reaction of the local community in south Northamptonshire and over the county boundary in north Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire was swift and intense. Even before the first major public meeting on 25th May in the Memorial Hall, Yardley Hastings, a number of village opposition groups had been formed. The Yardley Hastings meeting was attended by more than 400 people – so many that the proceedings had to be relayed to those outside. It was chaired by The Marquess of Northampton who pledged his total opposition to the proposed airport and his complete support for the opposition movement. He also donated £1,000 to it. As the owner of much of the land which the airport would have covered, his support was important and a significant encouragement to the opposition.

The meeting ended with the election of Peter Yates as the Yardley Hastings village group chairman, which perhaps illustrates the dual purpose of this meeting: it was both a local, village meeting and the first meeting of all those opposed to the Yardley Chase site. One of the guests at this meeting was Desmond Fennell, Chairman of the Wing Airport Resistance Association (WARA), which had fought against the nomination of

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Twenty-One Years Ago
The Battle of Yardley Chase

P.H. McKay

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Cublington by the Roskill Commission and now was leading the opposition at Hogg-eston. Co-operation between the various resistance groups was one of the features of the whole campaign.

The following Friday (1st June) a meeting of village representatives was held at the Social Club, Castle Ashby. This meeting saw the formal establishment of the umbrella organisation. Again, Lord Northampton was in the chair—he subsequently agreed to be President of the organisation. The name Yardley Airport Resistance Association (and YARA for short) was formally approved. There were two nominations for chairman, one for Bernard Livesey, a barrister from Harrold and the other for Christopher Marler from Weston Underwood. The minutes of the meeting state that it was agreed that both be elected to the Committee and that ‘they decide between themselves who should be chairman and who vice-chairman.’ After the meeting the latter insisted that the former take the Chair and thus it was that Bernard Livesey became Chairman of YARA. The Secretary, Charles Forestier-Walker, was also appointed as were the Treasurers, the chairman of the Technical sub-committee (Professor Harold Shaw) and the chairman of the Public Relations sub-committee (Lavinia Dyer). Peter Yates, the Yardley Hastings group chairman, and Andrew Marchant, solicitor, from Olney, also agreed to serve on the YARA Committee. Lord Northampton offered the organisation the use of an empty cottage at 25 High Street, Yardley Hastings as its office and distribution centre, an offer which was gratefully accepted. With quite unprecedented speed, for those days, a telephone was installed, with the number Yardley Hastings 777.

The YARA Executive Committee (as it called itself) was therefore quite small and made no pretence of being representative of the village groups which were affiliated to YARA. This was a conscious decision taken (not without opposition) at the 1st June meeting. In the early days when decisions needed to be taken fast this was undoubtedly an asset but later in the campaign, when it became a matter of waiting for the Study Group Report, it was less satisfactory.

The next few weeks were a period of intense activity culminating in a mass event in the Avenue at Castle Ashby on 14th July. Already YARA had its logo which was appearing on car stickers and T-shirts by late May or early June. A member of the audience at the 25th May meeting had mentioned that Chris Fiddes was prepared to design a poster for the campaign and this was the first one produced (see Figure 1). Not all the village groups liked it but few disputed its impact. The production of this poster cost the organisation virtually nothing, the plate-making, paper and printing were all donated.

On 2nd July, in preparation for the Castle Ashby event, the Chairman issued a press release setting out both YARA’s aims and achievements in the first few weeks of the campaign. While YARA’s first aim was to stop the selection of Yardley Chase as the third London Airport, it also associated itself with the Wing Association in its opposition to the Hoggeston site and sought to challenge the need for a third London Airport at all. Finally, if the need was proved, then the Airport should be located on a coastal rather than an inland site. He then went on to review progress:

- 60 villages have set up committees affiliated to YARA.
- 65,000 car/window stickers have been printed and distributed.
- 140,000 are on order and will be delivered in the next few days.
- 5,500 posters have been printed and distributed.
- 18,000 more are on order and delivery is imminent.
- 80,000 maps and information sheets and handouts have been distributed.
- 120,000 more are available for distribution.
- 1,600 T-shirts have been sold.
- 7,000 are on order.
- 10,000 badges are on order.

Fortunately, most of the publicity material had been donated and the T-shirt supplier was paid as the sales’ income came in. The
villages were also beginning to make contributions to central funds.

The Castle Ashby event was opened by John Dankworth and Cleo Lane from nearby Wavendon which happens to be almost exactly half way between Hoggeston and Yardley Chase. The protest part of the day was confined to the opening speeches – thereafter everybody treated it as the ultimate village fête. Some displays, some side-shows, some propaganda. Most of the stalls were set up and staffed by individual village groups but it had been agreed that the income from this event would all go to central funds. About £3,000 was raised, (the equivalent of about £7,000 in today’s terms). Attendance was 5,252, at least according to the gate returns.

Other public relations efforts were also underway. On 27th July, Anglia TV held a debate on the need for a third London Airport. YARA was represented by John Nutting (of Chicheley Hall) and a strong team of propagandists. An attractive brochure of photographs of the villages in the area likely to be affected by an Airport at Yardley Chase was produced by an Olney-based group including Gordon Osborn and Trevor Yorke. Sir John Betjeman, Poet Laureate, wrote a short introduction for it, characterising the area as ‘quiet, unassuming, untouristed, real country.’ This brochure was sent to all MPs and to anyone else whose support was thought worth cultivating. Most of the 5,000 print run had been disposed of, either by sale or by free distribution, by December 1979.

Via YARA News villages were encouraged to write to their local MP and also to the editors of the national newspapers –
names and addresses were provided, the compiler of the Newsletter being the wife of a Fleet Street sub-editor. The Grendon village group wrote to all 635 MPs. The Sherington village group produced a film of about 45 minutes duration which admirably captured the natural beauty of the Chase. Few who have seen it will forget the sequence linking Beethoven’s Pastoral (After the Storm) with the activities of a herd of deer. The film also included an interview with Lord Northampton photographed from the roof of Castle Ashby House looking up the South Avenue towards the Chase.

The YARA case was not however allowed to go unchallenged. YARA News of 20th July mentions the existence of WAY (Wings at Yardley), a pro-Airport organisation. Its progenitor, Peter Keggie, considered the geography of the whole of the South East and decided that Yardley Chase provided the ideal site. The construction of an airport would not displace many people and the road and rail links could be upgraded along the existing M1 and rail corridors to provide the appropriate transport connections to both London and the West Midlands. Mr Keggie lived in Hillingdon. His ideas were supported by Corby District Council which was faced with a significant unemployment problem following the closure of some of British Steel’s production facilities there.

The pace slackened somewhat as the holiday season approached but by this time the campaign had its ‘battle bus’ – a stripped out caravan equipped with a large-scale map of the sound footprint and other propaganda material. This was extensively used from late July onwards mostly at the invitation of organisers of local events who wished to express their support for the campaign.

The last great public relations event of the campaign was the presentation of a petition to the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, on her visit to Milton Keynes on 25th September. The anti-Yardley Chase petition contained some 32,000 names and its presentation was made to coincide with a similar petition from WARA. Perhaps more effective – certainly in terms of the press coverage – was the rather low key demonstration which accompanied the presentation. The YARA office had organised a coach for demonstrators, the only occasion during the campaign when direct action was endorsed by the central organisation. Proposals for more extreme direct action surfaced throughout the campaign but were generally aborted in the face of official opposition.

As the campaign progressed, there was a growing questioning, particularly regarding the ultimate disposal of central funds. This problem had in fact been determined by the Executive Committee at its meeting on 29th July which approved a statement pledging to repay village groups their contributions to central funds as far as funds permitted when YARA was disbanded. This statement was communicated to groups in the YARA News issue of 14th August.

The Study Group Report was originally scheduled for publication in mid October but this subsequently slipped to mid November. The publication date eventually turned out to be 17th December. October and November were therefore pretty quiet months as the Study Group Report was awaited. Increasingly there was a conviction that Stansted would be chosen, if not as a Third London Airport then at least for substantial expansion. This was supported by leaks in the newspapers and shortly before publication, YARA even managed to get hold of a late draft of the crucial chapter of the Study Group’s Report.

Finally on 17th December John Nott, Secretary of State for Trade, made his statement in the House of Commons. In this he encouraged greater use of regional airports but announced that he would not sanction the building of a major new Airport. Terminal 4 at Heathrow would be accepted but not Terminal 5. Subject to the outcome of a public enquiry, Gatwick would get a second terminal but not a second runway. Stansted would be expanded to cope with an increase in passenger numbers from 4 million a year to 15 million p.a. In addition provision should be made right
from the start for further expansion there to accommodate a second runway and a second terminal.

This appeared to let Yardley Chase off the hook, and was certainly how the news was received in Northamptonshire, but the two Reports, those of the Study Group and the Advisory Committee, were carefully studied over Christmas by the Executive Committee. As far as Yardley Chase was concerned, the Study Group concluded that the upgrading of the transport links would be difficult and expensive and that an Airport some 60 miles away from London would not be popular with the airlines. These objections were not unique to Yardley Chase but one further objection, the defence argument, was. The Study Group concluded that the relocation of the American Airforce bases at Upper Heyford and Alconbury together with the closure or relocation of a number of other smaller defence facilities would be necessary. The cost of this was prohibitive. ‘Yardley Chase was not the place’ apparently in those Cold War days.

The Executive Committee met on 6th January 1980 to determine how to proceed. With very little debate it was agreed to disband the organisation and transfer any remaining physical assets to Stansted. This meant little more than handing over the caravan. The cash remaining in central funds was to be returned to the village organisations in proportion to their contributions, subject to the retention of a reserve of about £750. The first distribution to village groups took place the same month when 80% of the amounts subscribed was returned. This amounted to £4,580. A further distribution of 10% followed a year later, thus village groups eventually got back 90% of the money they had subscribed. There was no formal gathering or party to mark the end of the campaign for although Yardley Chase
had been spared, the nomination of Stansted, an inland site, as, effectively, the third London Airport ran counter to YARA’s aims. The campaign had therefore only been partially successful. Nevertheless most of those involved in the fight felt (and indeed still feel) proud of the effectiveness of their efforts. The campaign was a unique manifestation of community action in the south of the county.

It is intended to deposit YARA’s archives in the Northamptonshire Record Office. But as this note was being drafted, the ghost of the Third London Airport reappeared. The Financial Times of 4th December 1998 reported that ‘Ministers have decided to delay detailed consideration of plans for a controversial new runway or airport in South East England until after the next election … the issue is too sensitive … [It] will be one of the most explosive planning issues for years …’. Meanwhile the outcome of the public enquiry into Terminal 5 at Heathrow is awaited.

Sources

The full titles of the Reports published in December 1979 are:


Both were published by HMSO. Other information is derived from the YARA archive.
BOOK REVIEWS

THE STORY OF WADENHOE
A Northamptonshire Village
edited by Rita Duffey
Wadenhoe Historical Group 1988
A5, 237 pp., illustrated. Price £15, obtainable from Stephen Hall, Manor Farm, Wadenhoe

This book is an in depth and wide-ranging study of Wadenhoe. The chapters are; The Rural Scene, Archaeology and Early History, The Village, Wadenhoe Church, Wadenhoe School, Wadenhoe in the 19th Century, Within Living Memory, and A Wadenhoe Anthology. Each section has a named author, of whom 13 (some well known in the county) have a listed ‘character note’, but there are several other contributors including members of the Ward Hunt family. The book traces its beginnings from an Adult Education course organized to mark the opening of a new Recreation Hall in 1990.

The village lies by the river in a very attractive part of the county where the Nene Valley has not been destroyed by gravel pits (and we should all help to ensure that they never do so). The church stands apart from the village on a hill next to humps and bumps of a manorial site. Both this site and some of the meadows are open to public access and it is hoped to bring them into the village conservation area.

The earthwork site has long received speculative interpretation as to its origin, suggestions being made that it was an Iron Age hillfort or merely the result of stone quarrying. A new geophysical survey undertaken in 1997 confirmed the existence of a complex stone building of recognizable medieval manorial plan with a free-standing stone tower like Longthorpe.

A detailed chapter by Brian Giggins describes the vernacular architecture of many of the older village houses, nearly all of them delightfully illustrated by David Marsden. There is also a complimentary section on modern houses, all of which look acceptable for a conservation area.

In 1981, the George Ward Hunt, the major landowner, formed the charitable Wadenhoe Trust to receive most of the estate consisting of buildings, farm land and woods, about 830 acres (after addition of more land in 1988). The primary objects (listed on p.205) include the requirement to preserve village properties as part of the national heritage, and to encourage the study of the archaeological sites and the indigenous flora and fauna to be found in the village and its surroundings.

As might be expected in a book from Wadenhoe, there are some poems, in fact a whole final chapter of them, and not all by Trevor Hold. One of Trevor’s I particularly like is titled ‘The Ghost Village’ describing the occupants of the churchyard, who once worked in the fields and gossiped in the pub, but are now silently gathered together ‘their worldly wisdom compressed to bald Hic Jacets’.

The book is soft-back, ‘perfect’ bound, presumably done to reduce costs, although the saving compared to having sewn sections glued into a soft-back is not great. A text of this quality justifies an index and ISBN status. But, in spite of these quibbles, the volume is a worthy addition to the series of ancient and modern Northamptonshire village histories.

David Hall
This book grew out of a university based project studying late medieval urbanism in the East Midlands which aimed to integrate archaeological and historical evidence to address the thorny research questions surrounding urban decay and recovery in the later 13th to 16th centuries. It is a ‘cheap and cheerful’ publication but provides a welcome addition to what is a surprisingly slim literature on the early history of the town of Northampton, given its ranking as one of the great towns of early medieval England, standing briefly, as it did, alongside places like Norwich and York.

The essays show a town which declined from the highest national stage to the second rank of ‘county town’. But interestingly, as also seen in Brackley, the county’s other major town whose wealth was built on the early medieval wool trade and cloth industry, this decline seems to have begun well before the impact of the economic recession of the 14th century. While Brackley became just another small town, Northampton was replaced in the high Middle Ages by Coventry as the regional centre of Midland England. The story is not simply one of decay, and the authors reveal a ‘structured’ decline. Some peripheral zones of Northampton were indeed all but abandoned and other parts came to specialise in often noisome industrial activities. However, other quarters became the focus of wealthy residence or saw significant commercial success. The latter, in particular, show that overall decline could be combined with continuing high wealth and intensive commercial activity, and even significant, civil investment through nearly two centuries dominated by recession.

The book comprises three quite separate parts. Jones’s archaeological chapter provides a useful update to the essay in the 1985 RCHME Inventory for Northampton, making use of the significant numbers of excavations on medieval sites across the town in the intervening 15 years. However his text lacks the incisive insights and depth of understanding of the Saxon and later history of the town that Williams was able to bring to the RCHME volume. One can’t help but feel that Jones was not given sufficient time for the in-depth study that was essential before significantly new perspectives could be drawn from the extensive if somewhat spatially biased archaeological evidence. In contrast, Laughton’s far longer (94 page) documentary chapter offers much more. She brings together a great deal of information not previously published and integrates it very effectively with evidence drawn from a range of well known secondary sources into a thought provoking review of the late medieval town. Their work is however let down in two fundamental ways. Firstly there is the failure to effectively address the original objectives of the project, because we are offered two separate essays linked only very loosely by Clarke’s short introduction, and some asides in Laughton’s chapter and a brief conclusion. Secondly there is the absence of any topographical reconstruction within which to place the varied evidence, underlined by the absence from the book of all but the most simple of town plans.

Thanks to the two devastating fires that ravaged the town in the early sixteenth and especially the later seventeenth century, Northampton lacks many of the documents and standing buildings that are found in some other major medieval towns. However it is clear from this book that there is still a vast potential which, if realised, would place Northampton back on the national map of medieval England in the same way that William’s excavation of the Middle Saxon ‘palace’ did for the Saxon town. It is therefore to be hoped that Laughton will take on the considerable challenge to carry forward her research into a more comprehensive study and write the authoritative book that the evidence so clearly cries out for. But to realise the true potential she must collaborate with an archaeologist, ideally Williams.
or Shaw, who can bring years of experience of the archaeology of the town, and who would provide the depth of understanding and conduct the intensive analysis that the raw archaeological data warrants. But most of all the well developed techniques of urban landscape archaeology or historical geography must be applied to the town, integrating documentary and archaeological evidence to provide a comprehensive topographical framework using regressive analysis from the post medieval back through to the high medieval. This is a very time consuming technique but work around the country, from Conzen’s pioneering analysis of Alnwick in 1960 through Keen’s impressive study of Winchester, has demonstrated clearly that this is an essential component to any serious study of urbanism in the last millennium. The failings of the present book reinforce that lesson.

If you are at all interested in the origins of your county town then you must read this book. Despite its limitations, which surely reflect the methodology and rapid nature of the original project, not the abilities of the two main authors, it still offers a valuable overview of one of the formative periods of Northampton’s history. The authors must be congratulated on producing an accessible and interesting study.

Glenn Foard

KATERYN PARR, THE MAKING OF A QUEEN
by Susan E. James
published by Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, 1999
ISBN 1 84014 683 4
Price £47.50

This book is set in three parts: The Parrs of Kendal; ‘Kateryn, the Queen’; My Lord Marquess of Northampton’.

Although the Parrs were primarily a Cumberland family, there were many instances where they married into Northamptonshire families. Kateryn’s Parr’s paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Fitzhugh, married as her second husband, Sir Nicholas Vaux of Harrowden. Her father, Thomas, and siblings were raised at Harrowden. Her aunt, Elizabeth, married William, Lord Vaux. Her mother, Maud, was the daughter of Sir Thomas Green of Green’s Norton. Her uncle, Lord Parr of Horton’s heiress daughter, Maud, was married to Ralph Lane of Glendon.

Kateryn, the first surviving child of Thomas and Maud was named after Henry the VIII’s Queen, Catherine of Aragon, who in all probability acted as god-mother, for Maud was one of the Queen’s ladies-in-waiting. The author uses this spelling of Kateryn because it was the style used by the Queen herself.

Life up to adulthood for Kateryn and her siblings – William to become Marquess of Northampton, and Anne the Countess of Pembroke – was advanced in a society where, ‘Nepotism was not a pernicious anomaly, it was a sacred obligation’! The family were fortunate, for Maud Green was a woman who ‘possessed a love of learning and self-confidence in her own abilities’ and certainly endowed her daughters with these qualities.

Sir Thomas Parr, Kateryn’s father, worked hard to increase his ‘estate’ in the court of Henry VIII, but was to die young at the age of 39, leaving a wife pregnant with a child, which did not survive, and three children under the age of five. ‘Yet Maud Parr lived for 14 more years and never seems to have contemplated remarriage. Fortunately for her, apparently, she had no near relatives apart from her sister, Anne, to pressure her into remarrying. On the basis of the evidence, Maud appears to have discovered what her daughter, Kateryn, was to discover some 26 years later, that widowhood for a woman could become a rite of passage from the bondage of social and familial imperatives to the freedom of self-determined action. Widowhood implied loss but it could also mean being set ‘at liberty’.
Formerly, life for the Parrs was the charmed and atmospheric existence of the Court. This was in the days of the King's first marriage, before 'the true nature of the King, fashioned as it was by genetics, inclination and the raw clay of circumstance, had yet to be revealed in 1509.' After her father's death, life became more precarious and resulted in a more circumspect home life for the widow, Maud, and her young family. It is likely that their home was at Rye House, a leased property in Hertfordshire.

There was great closeness between Kateryn, her siblings and their uncle, Sir William Parr of Horton. She sought and needed his protection throughout her life. Her brother was educated in the household of the young Duke of Richmond, Henry's illegitimate son born in 1519 of Elizabeth Blount, a lady in waiting to the Queen. Although Richmond died young, this beginning gave William an entrée to a circle of lifelong friendships with the children of courtiers.

Kateryn's hapless brother, William Parr, Marquess of Northampton, had matrimonial problems—a Tudor divorce from Anne Bourchier—a second marriage to Elisabeth Brooke which was repealed by an Act of Parliament on the Accession of Mary I and the reinstatement of the Roman religion. He only escaped the scaffold when Anne Bourchier, who was a-waiting on the Queen, spoke up for him in an effort to hold on to family manors and possessions. With a return to her father's religion, Queen Elizabeth sanctioned William Parr regaining his beloved wife, Elisabeth Brooke, but she died in 1565. At the end of his life and just five months before his death in October 1571, he married Helena Snakenborg.

As to Kateryn's four marriages, the author remedies an age-old misconception when she records that Kateryn's first husband was Edward Borough, and not Lord Borough, his grandfather. Modern divorce, families and their marriages and remarriages have nothing on the ramifications of Tudor relationships, for among the many roles of Kateryn Parr, she gained stepchildren in two marriages; she was stepmother to children of the Neville (Latimer) family; stepmother to the two Princesses, Mary and Elizabeth, and Edward the Prince of Wales, children of Henry VIII. As to her only surviving child by Thomas Seymour, a daughter named Mary, Kateryn died when she was five days old, even so the baby only lived two years. This was a complex story of relationships with these children, at the least she had charity for them, but mostly love, which was well reciprocated.

The Queen as Statesman
As Maud had been a model for her daughters, Susan James discusses Kateryn's influence on her times and shows that her strategies were a role model for her stepdaughter, Queen Elizabeth I.

Kateryn acted as Regent General of England, whilst Henry was in France. Not just presiding but ruling as well. Whether Queen Consort or Regent General, Kateryn's upbringing, education and life's experience enabled her to achieve much, and by it she was ennobled. As Regent General she was dealing with the antics of the Earl of Cumberland 'throwing down hedges' (presumably enclosing) when she reminded him how 'unmeet a time this is for such things, the King being out of the Realm.' Even the current modern fishing wars between the member states of the EU has its parallel when Kateryn was dealing with the taking of herrings by the Scottish and French ships of war; an annoyance to the English fishing industry 'when an important source of food in the English diet was a matter of immediate concern.' 'No more to you at this time, Sweetheart … for lack of time,' an epistle which could have been written by any soldier husband from the 'front' but this soldier was Henry VIII writing in September 1544 from his base in the North of France before the surrender of Boulogne.

Through the trauma and attendant problems of the establishing of the King as head of the Church of England, the extensive evils and evil influences of Thomas Cromwell becomes apparent. The Greens, the Lanes, the Vaux, in common with many other families of the nobility, were having to offer their manors as sweeteners to Cromwell. As the religion swung
one way, then another, so heresies and heretics were abundant. Kateryn’s great adversary was
Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester.

Reminding us that Kateryn dug deep beneath the surface of religious belief, this author has
got to the core of the issues of this vast subject. Kateryn was highly educated for a woman of
her time and among her published works were the Psalms or Prayers of 1544. A copy sold at
the Elton Hall 1931 library sale, contained a Presentation inscription by the Queen herself.
The Queen chose Princess Mary to be the translator of the Erasmus Paraphrases, Book of St.
John, which she did; later, the Princess as Queen Mary would order it destroyed as heretical.

Excluded from Henry’s presence on his death-bed meant that she was finally denied her
place as Regent when he died, with the Duke of Somerset ruling as Lord Protector for his
nephew, Edward VI. Kateryn was never again allowed access to the jewels, which Henry had
given her as Queen, even her wedding ring. Some of her manors were also disposed of.

Even religion could not hold sway over love. Her love for Seymour had been put on hold
when the King courted her after the death of Latimer her second husband. Now, at the death
of the King, Kateryn was possibly intrepid in her haste to wed Seymour and this meant that
she was never far from danger.

After so much unhappiness in her life, Kateryn now found in her new marriage to Thomas
Seymour a consuming passion reciprocated. The author, as an appendix, gathers together, for
the first time, the love letters to and from Kateryn from the collections of Dent-Brocklehurst at
Sudeley, Cecil at Hatfield, State Papers at the PRO and Rawlinson at the Bodleian. There are
nine letters. In one, she gives vent to her feelings of anger against the Lord Protector, her
husband’s brother, and his wife.

‘Your brother, hath this afternoon a little made me warm. It was fortunate we were so much
distant, for I suppose else I should have bitten him.’ And as to her sister-in-law, Anne Stanhope,
‘What cause have they to fear having such a wife? It is requisite for them continually to pray
for a short dispatch of that hell.’

A more intimate message to her husband contains a reference to the child that she was
carrying; ‘I gave your little knave a blessing, who like an honest man has stirred apace after and
before!’ Sadly Kateryn died of ‘puerperal or childbirth fever,’ five days after her daughter was
born, contracted, as we are told, from her doctor’s ‘dirty hands!’ Just 28 weeks after the death of
Kateryn, Thomas Seymour, her husband, was executed.

On 22nd May 1953 an auction at Christie’s contained a number of portraits being sold for
Mrs. Vincent Gompertz of Glendon Hall. One painting, of Queen Katherine Parr, was
catalogued as by Holbein. Subsequent to this being purchased by the National Portrait Gallery,
where it is known as NPG 4451, the artist was amended to being the work of Master John and
the portrait was re-attributed to being that of Lady Jane Grey. It was through the list of jewels
(British Library, Add. MS 46348), taken from Sudeley Castle after the execution of Seymour
that Susan James has been able to follow the descent of certain pieces – some formerly
belonging to Katherine Howard – and through this was enabled to categorically re-attribute
the Glendon Hall portrait of the Queen being Kateryn and not Lady Jane Grey (Susan James’
article, ‘Lady Jane Grey or Queen Kateryn Parr’ appeared in The Burlington Magazine, January

The portrait is very important, for it is believed to have been painted for Kateryn on her
marriage to the King and shows her wearing a girdle of cameos, and in particular, a crown-
headed brooch, which as the author says, ‘The inference could be drawn that the piece was
made for her and may perhaps have been a gift from her husband which is why she chose to
feature it in her portrait.’

This volume is contained within a general series emanating from the City University of
New York’s Center for the Study of Women and Society, entitled Women and Gender in Early
Modern England, 1500-1750, and seeks to re-interpret the perceived history of this period. The
Parr household was overwhelmingly female and a just subject for this series.
With so many players in the field, one wished for a **Dramatis Personae** to contend with the upward changing titles of the supernumeries; likewise a location map giving reference to the different residences. Some identity of artist and location of painting could have been helpfully appended to the photographic plates in situ.

For me, this book put many pieces of the jigsaw of Tudor history into the frame of the age from the refreshing stance of the female state and position, being single, married or widowed; even given some minor irritations of feminism. It is generously endowed with footnotes in the proper place and is well researched through state and family papers and unpublished scholarly theses. One would have wished to read all the articles written by the author on the Parrs mentioned in the footnotes. A more comprehensive genealogical ‘tree’ would have been a bonus! There is an excellent bibliography.

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**Rosemary Eady**

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**JOHN CLARE, A Bicentenary Celebration.**

*Edited by Richard Foulkes*

*University of Leicester, 96 pages, from the Department of Adult Education, Price £4.00*

**THE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT, John Clare and the self-taught tradition**

*Edited by John Goodridge*

*John Clare Society, Helpston, and the Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust (1994), 240 pages, illustrated, Price £6.50*

John Clare’s star is definitely in the ascendant. Not only are Eric Robinson and David Powell producing an authoritative text for the Oxford Standard Authors, but here are two collections of essays and reviews to celebrate Clare’s achievements.

The outstanding contribution is from Rononald Blythe, president of the John Clare Society. He writes about Robert Bloomfield, author of *The Farmer’s Boy*, of which Clare was a great admirer. Blythe notes that Alfred Tennyson was living at Epping while writing ‘In Memoriam’. The New Year bells of ‘Ring out, wild bells’ are those of Waltham Abbey. Professor John Lucas gives a full account of Bloomfield and his verses, concluding ‘no wonder Clare so admired him’.

John Goodridge writes about the ‘enclosure elegies’. Here Clare was combining materials from widely varying sources, a special skill of his. For David Powell the explanation of Clare’s genius remains an enigma to this day. He was largely self-taught. He read voraciously.

Doctor Keith Trick, a psychiatrist from St. Andrew’s Hospital, writes about the last two decades of Clare’s life. He describes asylum life in some detail. A 90 year-old Chelsea pensioner explained how he cared for Clare during his last days.

Richard Foulkes points out that John Clare has a memorial plaque in Poet’s Corner at Westminster Abbey and ‘his reputation will surely grow’. Poet Tom Paulin celebrates the bicentenary of England’s greatest nature poet with ‘animist vision’, the ‘Northamptonshire visionary’.

Besides all these superlatives, Clare was a satirist. His ‘The Parish’ has been in Penguin Classics since 1986.

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**David Sargant**
Not many village histories have a Foreword by Her Majesty’s Lord-Lieutenant for the county, but this is a notable exception. The Lord-Lieutenant, Lady Juliet Townsend, lives at Newbottle and has also contributed a chapter on her own family’s connections with the area, ‘F. E. Smith and the Birkenheads.’ It was Lady Juliet, who in her Shell Guide to the county (1968), described Northamptonshire as ‘rather like a diving seal, its head plunging into the fringe of the Cotswolds in the south-west, its tail trailing the Fens in the north-east, and one flipper thrust out into Buckinghamshire.’ If this analogy is accepted, then the parish of Newbottle with Charlton comes somewhere near the seal’s snout.

The twin villages provide an interesting coupling. Charlton is a village without a church or manor, Newbottle a church without a village. It was not until 1896 that they were joined in the same civil and ecclesiastical parish. Charlton, a typically ‘open’ village, with no dominant landowner, reached its prosperity in 1700. Its population today is just over 500. Newbottle, by contrast, was a ‘closed’ village, enclosed by the lord of the manor before 1500, and as a community shrank to extinction. Its population is now 24. All these facts come to life in the 33 chapters that make up the book. These include such topics as lacemaking – in the nineteenth century the second most important source of employment in Charlton after agriculture – and the Charlton Flower Show, complete with splendid photographs, a popular August event held in the gardens of Charlton Lodge from the early years of the twentieth century until the outbreak of the Second World War. There is, for botanists, a Checklist of Flora found in the two parishes during 1998 and 1999: a magnificent 270 species including, I was pleased to see, Meadow Saxifrage, Green Hellebore and Clustered Bellflower, but (alas!) no Fiddle Dock.

The idea for the book originated in 1996 when the Charlton and Newbottle Historical History Society came into being. Over the next three years, its members compiled, with the help of outside historians, 2500 years of the villages‘ history, from Rainsborough Camp, sixth century BC, to the present-day Millennial Survey of all those living in the villages at Easter 1998 (professions range from the traditional agricultural workers, farmers and publicans to chiropractors, HGV drivers and lampshade designers). Obviously four years is not long enough to collect, collate and compile a comprehensive history – many topics clearly need further research – but the result, attractively printed by the Stationery Office, with 29 colour and 76 black-and-white illustrations, is a fine Millennial memorial.

Trevor Hold

DAVENTRY PAST
by R. L. Greenall.
Phillimore, 1999, 32 pages plus xii, illustrated, Price £14.99

Ron Greenall has been a much loved and well respected tutor in local history in the county for very many years. His work at Daventry dates back to four years’ evening classes from 1974 to 1978, when the very full borough records in Northamptonshire Record Office were studied and transcribed. He wears his learning jauntily, and it must be unusual to find an economic historian with so strong a sense of humour. The early part of his account depends naturally on Tony Brown’s Early Daventry (1991), but his narrative is both seamless and highly readable. It has been maintained that some of the very best books have had a long period of gestation, this is another case in point.

Daventry has always flourished as a self-contained community, but Mr. Greenall successfully
sets it against county and national history. He has a ready eye for the quirkiness of local issues, and no idiosyncrasy goes unremarked. The entire range of Daventry’s existence down to the recent present is covered in searching detail, and a fine balance is maintained between all the various strands making up the picture. Ron has obviously become most affectionate and devoted to his fascinating subject. It will be a popular Christmas present.

David Sargant

Other publications

*Cake and Cockhorse*, the magazine of the **Banbury Historical Society**, is issued three times yearly. It often has articles and other information relating to Northamptonshire, and the issue for Spring 2000 (Volume 14 no. 8) has an article by Jeremy Gibson about Banbury Cross illustrated on a map of c.1550. The map shows most clearly the area around Warden Hill between Byfield, Aston le Walls, West Farndon and Trafford. It was drawn as the result of a dispute about enclosure and road diversion, and was possibly the occasion when the deserted village of West Warden was enclosed. The £10 annual subscription to the Society includes copies of all publications, including the hardback *Records* volumes when published.

The 1999 Winter issue of the *Cake and Cockhorse* contains an article on Eydon field names extracted from the first published Report of the **Eydon Historical Research Group** (1998), titled *Graffiti, Pigs and Old Lace*. It is an A5 booklet of 48 pages and has sections classified into, *Geography* (includes field and street names), *Eydon Events* (enclosure and the great fire), and *Occupations and Activities* that includes items on the Eydon Pig Club and lace making. The Report, full of interesting and useful information, is obtainable from Mrs. Leila Leeson, 12 Moreton Road, Eydon, Daventry, NN11 3PA, price £4.

**Helmdon Branch of the WEA** published *Aspects of Helmdon*, Number 3 in 1999. The group continues to be very active in research into the village history. This third booklet (A5, 52 pages, price £3.50) contains articles about 40 years of the WEA in Helmdon, about Helmdon School that began in 1853, ‘Of Wine and Wild Flowers’ and ‘Recollections of Childhood at Grange Farm’ in the 1920s. The school article is written by Mr. G. Ipprave, who was headmaster 1957-78. Copies of the book and information about Helmdon WEA may be obtained from the secretary, Audrey Harwood, Church Street, Helmdon, NN13 5QJ.

John M. Smith and the **Flore Heritage Society** continue their detailed studies of Flore history, the latest publications being about Flore Enclosure and Flore House. These are thorough pieces of work, well illustrated with photographs and plans. The reports are expensive to produce and are available in very limited numbers. Copies can be consulted in local and county libraries and at the Record Office.
OBITUARY NOTICES

Henry Bird

Henry Bird, who died at the age of 90 on 16th April 2000, was born on 15th July 1909 at a bakery, 43 Green Street, in the parish of Northampton St. Peter's. July 15th was also the date of Rembrandt's birthday, which Henry liked to point out. His mother was the daughter of a shoemaker, and he was always anxious to stress his working-class origins. He was baptized at All Saints' Church and later went to All Saint's parochial school. His family attended St. Peter's Church and Henry served in the choir there. During sermons he would sit sketching, looking at the decorative capitals and other carvings. The rector, discovering his abilities, gave him much encouragement. By the age of 11 he decided that he wanted to become an artist and attended classes at an Art School then in Abington Square.

After working for six years at a variety of manual jobs, only one of which was at all connected with drawing, he won a scholarship to the Royal College of Art in London in 1930. One of Henry's earliest works of decoration in a church was his embellishment of the screen in Earls Barton All Saint's in 1935, favourably commented upon by Pevsner. This may be Henry's first appearance in a work of reference. After a time seeking portrait commissions and painting inn signs, he became a lecturer in art history at Aberystwyth in 1936. Having now met the aspiring actress Freda Jackson who was with a Repertory Company at Northampton, Henry's salaried post enabled them to marry.

Teaching in Wales continued until 1942, when he moved to the London theatres as a scene painter, so beginning his long association with all aspects of theatre design. One of his stage-set models is preserved at the Royal Theatre, Northampton. After the war Henry taught at Oxford while Freda pursued her stage and film career. The Birds returned to live in Northampton in the early 1950s, first at Harlestone Road and finally, in about 1960, in Hardingstone House. His first studio was over the Spirella Corset Shop in Abington Street, subsequently moving to an attic above the George Row Club.

In 1954 Henry Bird and G. B. Holland created a mural scheme for the entire inside surface of the chapel of St. Crispin Hospital. The figures of all his mural works have faces of local models; these faces could be chance acquaintances or notable local people. Other major works are at Danetree Hospital, St. Andrew's Kettering, the Baptist Chapel Charwelton and the parish church of St. Margaret, Denton.

Denton church was a very plain building with pointed windows. Henry made a cardboard model, according to his scheme of decoration. By this time, he had been a vocal member of the Diocesan Advisory Committee; he had his original idea for work on Denton church in about 1960 but did not receive official permission from Peterborough until 1976. Henry was accustomed to this sort of frustration and he always chafed under it, but he was both dogged and persistent. Denton people were amazed at the speed with which their church was transformed, and they have remained very satisfied with the result. He took hardly little notice of any comment or criticism of his work. His own conception and execution was all that concerned him. He was always completely self-assured.

Among his major public work is the decoration of the Ashcroft Theatre in Croydon, and in Northampton for the Royal Theatre in Guildhall Road. Here he painted in a lavish baroque the entire safety curtain, filling it with exuberant figures, in a style precisely suited to the fulsomely gilded Victorian auditorium. His major Northampton piece, presented to the Borough in 1953, is unfortunately rarely shown. It is a curtain showing the ‘Muses Contemplating Northampton’.

Henry Bird was a fascinating character, extremely knowledgeable on all aspects of Art History. He was a master of painting technique and life drawing; he still worked in George Row well into 1998. His many works will continue to give great pleasure, reminding us of the gusto with which he enriched life.

Compiled from information supplied by John Rigby and David Sargant
Geoffrey Perry, MBE

Geoffrey Perry, schoolmaster and space expert, died on 18th January 2000 aged 72. He was born on 4th August 1927. During an extraordinary career teaching physics at Kettering Grammar (now Boys') School, Geoffrey Perry became one of the world's foremost authorities on the Soviet rocket and satellite programme and put himself and his school on the space exploration map. From the moment the first Sputnik was launched in 1957, he decided to make science a matter of compelling interest to his pupils by involving them in the tracking of all the subsequent Soviet rocket launches and satellite orbits with equipment built at the school. Looking sceptically at Perry's primitive receiving equipment – as so many of the visitors to his Heath-Robinson tracking station did – no one could have dreamt that he would become one of the world's most reliable sources of information on the progress of the Soviet space programme. Time and time again Perry and his school team were the first to report to the public the details of Soviet space triumphs and disasters, and he was often able to predict what the Russians would be up to next. It was Perry who announced to the world the grim failure of the Soyuz II space mission, when his recorders established that the hearts of the three Soviet cosmonauts had ceased to beat. And when an American Apollo spacecraft linked up with a Soviet Soyuz for the world's first space handshake, he was correct in predicting that this was scheduled to take place not over Moscow, as Soviet propaganda insisted it would, but, more prosaically, over Bognor Regis (in the event the Russians refused to make their move into the tunnel between the two craft and the handshake took place a few minutes late, over the French coast). In 1966 he astonished the Senate Committee on Aeronautical and Space Sciences by revealing that the Russians had built a new launching site at Plesetsk in the Artic. In 1970 he scooped the news by reporting the launch of the first Chinese satellite; in 1978 he predicted the crash of the Russian nuclear-powered satellite Cosmos 954 two months before it happened. ITN had been adroit enough to sign him up as a space adviser in the 1960s, and its steady stream of space scoops was the despair of BBC rivals. He later become a space adviser and a member of ITN's commentary panels during space missions. Yet Perry remained the amateur boffin. His monitoring equipment consisted of a small receiver and aerial. With felt-tip pens wired up to trace the received signal – whether it was the heartbeat of cabin crew or other data concerning the behaviour of the spacecraft – he was able to record what shape any Soviet space mission was in, and predict its likely duration. In all the publicity that came his way, Perry scrupulously ensured that pupils who had helped him received their due.

Geoffrey Perry was born in Braintree, Essex and educated at Braintree County High School and Reading University where he took his BSc. His interest in space flight had begun in 1944 when a V2 fell two miles from his home. When it emerged that – unlike the V1, which was a subsonic pulse-jet powered pilotless aircraft – the new V-weapon was a genuine hypersonic, high-altitude rocket, he realised that the age of space travel was just round the corner. After graduating, he taught for several years at a school in Gloucestershire before joining the science staff at Kettering in 1952. He remained there until his retirement in 1984 as head of physics of what was by then a comprehensive. Few physics classes can ever have received such a 'hot from the wires' education in the progress of space flight technology as Perry gave his. But away from the excitement and the television appearances, he was assiduous in inculcating the basics into his charges, and never shirked of first-year classes. He was appointed MBE in 1973 for his work in setting up the Kettering tracking station, and awarded the Jackson-Gwilt Medal and Gift of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1974. The £50 gift was spent on an antenna and pre-amplifier for the school. Perry had honorary degrees from Leicester, Reading, Loughborough and the Open University. Kettering honoured him last year by naming the Perry Science Centre of its Tresham Institute after him. In retirement he lived in Bude, Cornwall, where he and his wife Jean had taken their holidays regularly for 40 years. He savoured the walks on North Cornwall's magnificent cliffs and the birdwatching there. He is survived by his wife Jean and their daughter. (Courtesy of The Times)
Commander Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, Bart.

Commander Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, 5th Baronet, Royal Navy (retired) was the man who rescued Rockingham Castle from the encroachments of Corby New Town. He came from a very remarkable naval family. There were Tudor and Stuart admirals, and one of Nelson’s captains was made a baronet for two single-ship victories in his frigate Amethyst, capturing larger French ships. The second Sir Michael was Commander-in-Chief Far East, and was so successful in putting down Chinese pirates, that Lloyds’ Patriotic Fund awarded him the stupendous sum of £90,000 plus an immense silver dinner service. The 3rd Baronet, Sir Michael, GCB, was in the Crimea in 1855, and later took over as Commander in Chief, Mediterranean, after Sir George Tyron had drowned in a collision between the Victoria and Campdenown during exercises off Syria. He restored the morale of the fleet by making them manoeuvre even faster than before. The fourth admiral, Sir Michael’s father, commanded the battleship Centurion at Jutland in 1919, the Aegean Squadron in 1918-19, the Black Sea Forces in 1920, and was the only British admiral to have flown his flag on the Caspian Sea. He was Commander in Chief, North America in 1923-4, and died of pneumonia as Second Sea Lord in 1925.

Michael was born in 1909. In addition to the seafaring tradition, he inherited property in Plymouth through his great-grandmother, Elizabeth Culme of Plympton and Tothill, and in 1925 the Norman castle of Rockingham came to him with five thousand acres through his grandmother, who had been Mary Georgiana Watson. His great-uncle and predecessor was the Reverend Wentworth Watson, vicar of Monmouth, an admirable but unworldly parson. Michael’s father, Vice-Admiral Sir Michael Culme-Seymour, 4th Bart, died three weeks after the Reverend Wentworth Watson, and so two levies of death duty were exacted when he was aged 19 and serving as a midshipman. The death duties were prodigious, and depression such that development in Plymouth was at a standstill, and farming at such a low ebb that most tenants had had their rents lowered or discounted altogether.

Rockingham remained largely Tudor and Victorian, with bedrooms leading into each other. It was then let for five years, to pay off some of the death duties, to an American newspaper proprietor, who installed heating, bathrooms and other comforts. At the end of the tenancy, the millionaire, undiscouraged by the fact that his wife had departed for Paris with the local Master of the Fox Hunt, offered Michael a blank cheque for the house: acceptance would have been tempting to any young man of 22 not schooled in the notion of ownership as stewardship.

Meanwhile Michael continued to live the jolly impecunious life of any young naval officer in the late twenties and the thirties – cheerful, sociable, athletic, able at his job, and hotly pursued by the girls. Though responsive to advances, he was bored by the pursuit. Yet it somehow came about that when a young woman followed him to Bermuda or Malta, the cruiser in which he was serving just happened to be dispatched to the Black Sea the day before the threatened arrival. From 1934-36 Michael served in the post of naval ADC to the Governor General of Canada, visiting much of that country.

When Civil War broke out in Spain, Michael was serving in the destroyer Boadicea patrolling off eastern Spain, where they heard with horror of the German bombing of Guernica, an attack on an open city till then inconceivable. The outbreak of World War II found him as the youngest officer on a course in London at the Imperial Defence College, from which he was briskly removed to take command of the destroyer Brazen at Portsmouth. He found no captain from whom to take over, no first lieutenant and numbers of seamen were awaiting court-martial. However all was soon put to right, and a year was spent escorting convoys in home waters. He was next sent to serve with the Commander in Chief in the Mediterranean Fleet in Alexandria. This was a testing post, and after a time Michael came home on sick leave. Upon recovery, he was promoted Commander and ended the War in the Pacific. He retired from the Navy to run Rockingham. He wrote a long letter expressing sadness over ending a family
connection with the Navy that had endured non-stop for nearly 200 years. The Admiralty replied in two words ‘resignation accepted’ and enclosed 56 coupons ‘for the purchase of civilian clothes.’

In 1947 he married Lady Faith Nesbit, daughter of the 9th Earl of Sandwich, and settled down to rebuild the estate and complete paying off death duties. One of the more pressing matters was Corby New Town, which was encroaching from the south. Whilst the sale of development land, albeit by compulsory purchase, was a welcome source of capital, the prospect of development up to the castle gates and across the Park was horrific. Michael succeeded in diverting the bulk of the new development away from the immediate area of the castle and used the funds raised by land sales to improve the tenant farms and modernize the cottages in the village that had been untouched since the nineteenth century. The final task was to renew the castle roof which took almost six years. With the estate in thoroughly good order he handed it on to his nephew, Michael Saunders-Watson in 1967, retiring to live in Dorset in 1971.

His interests during the period at Rockingham were wide ranging. He founded the Ironstone Royalty Owners Association to represent landowners whose land had been torn apart by open-cast mining, and was largely instrumental in establishing the Ironstone Restoration Fund to which owner and operator jointly contributed and enabled much of the land to be restored. He became chairman of the Taxation Committee of the Country Landowners Association and was responsible for raising the profile of the Association. In the 1960s and 70s he was a familiar figure both in the Inland Revenue and at CLA meetings across the country, bringing a clear logical mind to deal with tax problems that affected landed estates. He was concerned to show that land management was just as much a business occupation as running a company. For these activities he was awarded the Bledisloe Gold Medal for landowners in 1972.

He became a JP in 1949 and served on the bench until his retirement in 1971. He was High Sheriff of Northamptonshire in 1966, a Deputy Lieutenant and a member of the County Council for seven years. Throughout his life, his great love was painting and whilst at Rockingham he acquired a large number of important contemporary works by Stanley Spencer, Matthew Smith, William Sickert and Paul Nash among others. He firmly believed that contemporary painting could hang happily with the old masters and certainly at Rockingham that was proved correct. His interest in painting continued after he moved to Dorset and he became closely involved with the work of the Contemporary Art Society.

He leaves an adopted step-daughter

Compiled from information kindly supplied by Commander L. M. M. Saunders-Watson
Telemessage from the Northamptonshire Record Society
to Clarence House

The President, Sir Hereward Wake, Bart, M.C., D.L., the Chairman and members of the Northamptonshire Record Society wish to express their admiration for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother and send her their sincere congratulations on the occasion of her forthcoming 100th birthday.

Telemessage to Sir Hereward Wake from Clarence House

Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother much appreciated your kind message on her 100th birthday and sends her very sincere thanks to you and to all those who joined in these good wishes.
Instructions for contributors

All contributions must be provided in hard copy and electronic format on a disk (preferably in Word). Please use the existing style of NPP. Normally, the maximum length is 6,600 words. Shorter articles and small items are also welcome. Draft texts may be sent for discussion. Printed references used more than a few times should be abbreviated after the first time and referred back to the full citation. Alternatively the Harvard system may be used in the footnotes (e.g. Bailey 1996, 28) and the full reference given in a bibliography at the end of the article.

Each article should have at least one illustration, and full articles at least three. All illustrations must be good quality, with copyright permission stated and obtained where appropriate.
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(The History and Antiquities of Northamptonshire by John Bridges)