THIS NUMBER HAS ARTICLES ON

THE LADIES OF LAMPORT
THE NINTH EARL OF EXETER AS AN ANTIQUARIAN
NEWTON BROMSWOLD MANORIAL LAND
AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENT IN POST-INCLOSURE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE, 1700-1850: PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION
THE PRODIGAL RECTOR OF BLISWORTH
A ‘SAD, SAD NARRATIVE’: THE DEATH OF DIGBY DOLBEN
THE NORTHAMPTON WOMEN’S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNION, 1912-14
‘PETERBOROUGH’S WARSHIP’: MOTOR TORPEDO-BOAT 777, 1946-51

BOOK REVIEWS

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PAST AND PRESENT

Number 55 2002 £3.00

Cover illustration:
Newton Bromswold earthworks
March 1975
D N Hall
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE
PAST AND PRESENT
2002

Number 55
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All communications regarding articles in this and future issues should be addressed to David Hall, the Hon. Editor, Northamptonshire Record Society, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton, NN4 8BQ. Published by the Northamptonshire Record Society

Number 55

ISSN 01490 9131

Typeset by John Hardaker, Wollaston, Northants and printed by Alden Press, Oxford OX2 0EF
NOTES AND NEWS

This year sees the completion of retrospective indexes for *NPP*. As from last year there is an index in each annual number. There remained without index the four separate parts of Volume IX (1994-1997) and the annual numbers 51, 52, and 53 for the years 1998-2000. The combined index will be the last in the ‘free-standing’ format with lists of authors, articles, etc. in addition to a general index. Thereafter there will be annual indexes of persons, places and subjects; the authors and article titles being easy to ascertain from the contents list.

The Record Society's lectures occasionally become *NPP* articles, but most do not and are hence unappreciated by those members unable to attend meetings. Although the printed word cannot very well represent a particular lecturer's enthusiasm or replace the information given by slides (and in the case of the lecture on medieval monastic music, a recording of 15th-century choral works with a backdrop slide of Fotheringhay church), it would be useful to have a summary printed in *NPP*. This was a suggestion of member Tony Ireson, and I am asking for a volunteer to present 500 or so word summaries of future Society lectures. It may be a task for say just one year, with only two lectures, the job then to be passed on to another member.

This year we have been saddened by the loss of two very distinguished members of the Record Society, and indeed, a loss to the County of Northamptonshire as a whole. Tony Ireson who, as well as being a journalist, has written many historical works and George Freeston, well known for his studies of Blisworth and the canal and much more. Obituaries and appreciations of both are included in this number of *NPP*, as well as a Blisworth article edited by Barbara Hornby. In this we see the value of long-term detailed studies of one place or theme, piecing together scraps of widely scattered evidence. Without the information presented in the article, the Duke of Grafton’s critical aside in a letter of 1845 about the ‘parson’ of Blisworth would be quite lost.

If you are short of ideas for Christmas presents this year, then there is an opportunity not available since 1937 – the purchase of a new volume of the *Victoria County History*. The volume for the Cleyley Hundred, edited by Philip Riden, will be published later in the year. We all look forward to the continuation of the series, especially for those parts of the county only covered by Bridges, and being deprived of the benefit of Baker's work or that of the early *VCH* volumes.

My thanks are due to authors for presenting an interesting range of articles and to reviewers of books for their time and trouble. I am grateful to members of the Record Society Council for their help during the year, often being called at inconvenient times or at short notice. Special thanks go to Leslie Skelton and Jean Hall for their help with *NPP* production in obtaining estimates, and for ensuring that volumes are delivered. The Society can be contacted on Mondays and Wednesdays on 01604 762 297.

David Hall
Notes on contributors

Frances Redpath is a retired Modern Languages teacher who now lives in south-eastern Leicestershire. She has been a guide at Lamport Hall for 10 years and this inspired her to study for an MA in English Local History at Leicester University, obtaining this degree 40 years after obtaining her first one.

Trevor Hold was born, bred and still lives in Northamptonshire, and his music and poetry reflect his lifelong affection for his native county. He taught music at the Universities of Aberystwyth, Liverpool and Leicester and now works as a freelance composer and writer. His study of English Romantic Song, Parry to Finzi: 20 English Song-Composers, has recently been published by Boydell and Brewer.

Dr. Steven Hollowell has lived in Northamptonshire all his life and is now a teacher and occasional lecturer at Nottingham University. His research doctorate followed a long-term study of Northamptonshire enclosure and he has published a book on enclosure records.

Barbara Hornby, secretary of the Northamptonshire Association for Local History and a former editor of Northamptonshire Local History News, was awarded an MA in Local and Regional History from the University of Warwick in 1997 and won the Victor Hatley Memorial Prize in the same year.

Geraldine Hunt was born at Manor Farm and is an amateur historian. One project tracing the author of an unnamed diary chronicling the year 1888, took her to Sussex, County Durham and Wiltshire. Relatives of the diary writer were eventually traced in Australia. She has had articles relating to conservation work published in The Countryman, Home and County, Wiltshire Life and Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire Life.

H. J. K. Jenkins chairs the Fenlighter Project, based at Peterborough.

The late Dr. Eric Till, OBE, worked for over 40 years on the records of Burghley House and he also analysed many of the property deeds relating to the older houses of Stamford. His monograph, A Family Affair, Stamford and the Cecils, was published in 1990.

Dr. Richard Whitmore was born and raised in Leicester. He studied for a History and Politics BA degree at De Montfort University before transferring to the University of Leicester to undertake an MA under the tutelage of Ron Greenall. At Leicester he completed a PhD on Women’s Social and Political Union within the East Midlands. Since 1999, he has taught economic and social history for the University of Leicester in Northampton.
Most country houses have a story to tell, it lies behind the smiles on the faces of the family portraits which look down from the walls. The guide books and county histories tell us about the male members of the families who once lived there, chronicling their role as member of parliament, local magistrate and land owner but only rarely is mention of the role played by the female members in the history of the house. Wives, mothers and sisters were a vital and essential part of the whole but usually few facts are known of their lives.

Yet, research into the documents they left behind, and now stored in the Northampton Record Office, gives us much insight into their way of life. The 18th-century Isham ladies come alive as we read the letters which they wrote or received so many centuries ago. We make their acquaintance as people, with all the virtues and shortcomings that lie behind the painted face in portraits scattered around the hall.

Lamport Hall (Figure 1) lies mid-way between Northampton and Market Harborough and enjoys commanding views over the Northamptonshire countryside. The Isham family lived there for over four hundred years until Sir Gyles Isham, the twelfth baronet, died in 1976 and it was taken over by the Lamport Hall Trust. John Isham, a successful wool merchant and the fourth son of Euseby Isham of Pytchley Hall near Kettering, bought the manor of Lamport in 1560 and his large portrait dominates the entrance hall. Lamport Hall is renowned for its fine collection of paintings, portraits of the prominent family members who shaped the destiny of the Hall and the Isham family. Justinian, the second baronet, was one of the early members of the Royal Society, and commissioned John Webb in 1655 to build a magnificent entrance hall and reception room in the new Palladian style (Figure 2). His son, Thomas, went on the grand tour in 1676 to 1679 and brought home from Italy many paintings and other objets d’art; and Justinian the fifth baronet, commissioned Francis Smith of Warwick in 1732 to build a library wing for the family collection of fine books.

Justinian, the fourth baronet, a second son with a career in the political establishment, inherited when his older brother Thomas, died from smallpox. Justinian and his wife, Elizabeth, had 14 children, six girls and eight boys born between 1685 and 1700, though four died in infancy. There is little detail of the childhood of this large family.

As was usual at this period the girls would be educated at home, probably sharing a tutor with the eldest brother, Justinian, who was...
later sent by his father, no doubt anticipating the Hannoverian succession, to finish his education at the Ritterakademie in Wolfenbüttel, North Germany. Vere often wrote to him there in French, so it would seem that their father wished all his children to be well educated. Many letters, diaries and accounts from this generation have been stored and this essay will use these documents in an attempt to portray the lives of the women born or married into this generation of a country gentry family.

The four surviving daughters were Vere, Edmunda, and Hester, who each lived to relatively old age and Susanna, the youngest, who died at the early age of 29 in 1726 at Bath. The two unmarried sisters, Vere and Edmunda, were very different, as shown in the following letter written 27th April 1726 from Vere to brother Justinian referring to sister Susanna’s final visit to Bath:

My poor sister she continues very ill, Doctor Kimberley thinks it absolutely necessary that she should go to the Bath: and my father thinks it necessary that I should go with her, which for several reasons … I would have avoided and my sister Munda would have been very well pleased to have gone, for the hurry of that place would have been much more agreeable to her than to me …

Vere, (Figure 3) who found life at Lamport somewhat dull, left the hall in 1733 and went to live in Twickenham. Edmunda remained at Lamport but also spent time with sister Hester at Brixworth Hall, where she enjoyed the local social round interspersed with visits to Bath, Oxford and London.

Five of the six boys married; Mary, the wife of Justinian, the fifth baronet, and Elizabeth, the first wife of Edmund, who succeeded his brother in 1737, were prolific letter writers. Mary comes through as a quiet diffident person who did not fit into the close knit family circle and, even today, her portrait is marooned in an upstairs dressing room. Elizabeth was a rather difficult character as shown by her portrait, found next to that of her husband in the drawing room. Yet this haughty lady was in tears when she received no letters from her husband during her stay in Bath in 1738 – ‘I hardly know what I write to you and Munda for I was crying all the time. Mrs Ford came up and assured me letters often miscarried …’

As this large family reached marriageable age suitable partners had to be found for the four daughters. Apparently Francis Raynsford, a local man from nearby Brixworth Hall, had first shown his attentions to Susanna, as she wrote to her brother in July 1702:

The grand affair of our family is much at a stand though we see the little gentleman

1. IC1876.
2. IC2581.
almost daily, either at Brixworth or Lamport or half way. We are frequently merry and beat it into their brains yet they are to have one another; he grows very familiar if it is a sign of love, for instance after the fair at night the gentlemen and the ladies had a dancing at Northampton, he was there and told sister Hester she danced the worst of anybody there but in a jeering way tell her now she danced the best, they both seem very well pleased to be told it, and sometimes we extract fine speeches off him to her; he promised to give her all he won at raffling (?) at the fair, but fortune not being his friend, the lady went away without her fairing. For my part I don’t care, I’m of the right side of the bush, I’m sure I’ve had the most solid proof of his love, he gave me a handsome snuff box, I’m very willing to let her have his frothy speeches, so I have the presents. I’m certain I’ve had the first he has made to our family, which is a great satisfaction to me.3

But he chose Hester and she was the only daughter to marry and have a family, though some of the babies died. After her marriage to Francis, Hester was always referred to as ‘sister Raynsford.’ The marriage was of short duration and her husband died five years later, leaving her with young children. Though I found none of her letters, the others make many references to her and there is the impression that her husband left little money for her and their family.

There appears to be no record of suitors for Vere and Edmunda except a note in the ledger of a lost letter from Mary to her husband to the effect that she – ‘wants sister Munda to go with her to Bath to avoid a gentleman who is about to propose to her, not altogether a desirable match’ but no further details are given.

Justinian, the heir to the baronetcy, accepted a marriage arranged by the respective parents, as was customary at that time. He did meet his future bride first and both partners were pleased with the match. Letters chart the course of the negotiations. On 28th January 1724 Sir Justinian, his father, wrote to Lisle Hackett of Moxhull in Warwickshire, about the proposed match with the latter’s only child, Mary.

Sir, I am very glad to find that you think my last proposal so very reasonable as to agree to them without objection … I think there remains nothing more but an interview betwixt the young couple; concerning which I write to my son this post that he may wait upon you and your daughter, as soon as he conveniently can and you please …4

I could find little evidence of affection on the son Justinian’s part; but Mary, however, seemed pathetically eager to please, possibly because she was in her late twenties and well past marriageable age, as the following letter written after his first visit shows.

Sir, I received an obliging letter from you, wherein I found a character far exceeding anything I can pretend to, so yet I presume

3. IC2485.

4. IC1853.
those sublime encomiums were there to
fore addressed to some other person and
when your thoughts were employed on a
subject so pleasing, you have now directed
them to me, for your diversion. I cannot
forbear mentioning, yet I am so much
pleased with the brightest part of your
character, yet I should think myself happy
could I imitate it, which would be the
greatest pleasure and advantage to sir, your
humble servant M. Hackett.

Her dowry and preparations for the marriage
were detailed in a letter from her father
before the marriage:

that the three thousand one hundred
pounds are paid, and the other two hun-
dred will be paid as promised, if you find
your good father so insist in having the
other seven hundred paid … if you think
my wife is too tedious in preparing my
daughter’s cloths and other necessaries, as
I fear you do, I am now to acquaint you
it will not be long before all things are
ready …

This latter sum must have been paid in instal-
ments, which continued long after both
fathers were dead.

Justinian made few references to his wife
in the diary he kept during their travels
together to Bristol Hot Springs and Bath in
1730. It is difficult to determine whether they
spent time together or separately but we do
know from his account book that he made
his wife a quarterly allowance of fifty pounds
and paid all expenses.

One of the major problems of the 18th
century was health and the lack of adequate
medical expertise. One popular solution was
a visit to a spa and the Isham ladies made
many visits to Bath, often on medical advice,
though not in such an extreme condition as
Susanna. In 1726 she was ‘in a very deplorable
and weak condition, and the doctor can do
nothing but make use of the last remedy,
which is the Bath.’ In fact she died there
within a few weeks and was buried in Bath
Abbey.

Mary (Figure 4) made frequent visits to
Bath though no specific reason is given for
her visits. There is an entry in her husband’s
diary on 17th July 1730, which stated that his
wife had been advised to ‘make use of the
Bristol and Bath waters.’ I suspect that the
reason was her failure to provide the expect-
ed son and heir. An earlier bald entry in
August 1726 stated ‘Upon my return to
Moxhull I heard that my wife had miscarried
on Thursday, the 18th inst. but not being far
gone, she was soon well again.’

Her letters from Bath, where her husband
would leave her, often in the company of her
mother, contain many references to taking
the waters. In May 1731 and 1732 ‘including
bathing which I do three times a week …
being advised to it’ and a few weeks later ‘I
am advised to bathe frequently, after a partic-
ular manner … which I pursue with diligence
and the longer I follow it the more good in
all appearance will do me …’ In another let-
ter she told her husband ‘By the doctor’s

5. IC1854.
6. IC1859.
7. IC1875.
8. IL2686.
orders I was bled this morning;\textsuperscript{10} but no reason is given for this action although we know from her husband’s account book this cost 10s 6d.

Elizabeth who visited Bath in 1738 gave more explicit detail of her complaint in a letter to her husband ‘My stomach has been very well this week and I hope I shall find great good for I find numbers come here for nervous complaints and tell me they have received great benefit . . . had you seen me eat yesterday of a boiled leg of mutton only you would think our stomach was mended.\textsuperscript{11} Her health was no better on her visit in 1746, as her husband wrote from Lamport on 19th November ‘My dear, I am sorry to find by your last letter that your head was so bad for two days together, but as you say on the whole you are better. I hope you will soon get rid of that other complaint . . . ‘\textsuperscript{12}

Smallpox was the scourge of the time and the Isham family had reason to fear this illness. The third baronet, their uncle, had died in 1681 at the early age of 25 and even the lucky ones who recovered were left with dreadful scars, so there was consternation in 1733 when it was learnt that Edmunda had contracted the disease. Letters chart its course and the happy outcome. We first learn of her affliction in a letter written on 24th June 1733 – ‘sister Munda has the smallpox but does not need a physician’ a letter written three weeks later mentions ‘the good fortune of sister Munda’ and on 19th June her brother wrote – ‘I left sister Munda at Twickenham . . . I believe in a little time will have no sign of smallpox. ‘\textsuperscript{13}

The mistress of the household was responsible for the servants and their well being, as shown by this letter from Mary when the servants whom she had taken to Bath, fell ill at the end of January 1732/3:  

\begin{quote}
epidemical distemper, which is rife here as in most parts, particularly in the house, it has visited almost every person, of which some are on the recovery, others very ill as Mrs Musgraves, Silvester and Will, the boy, have both been ill, for which I was obliged to have recourse to the medicines for them, which I hope has not made much addition to the apothecary’s bill, for be assured I act in all respects with as much discretion and frugality as my mean understanding is capable of being altogether ignorant of my inabilities . . .\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

An entry in Justinian’s account book reads ‘1732 February 25th. To Mr Homer Druggist £14.’

The lady of the house did not usually concern herself with the management of the estate but in 1733/4 during building work for extensions to Lamport Hall, Mary sent a progress report to her husband in London ‘March 20 . . . this day the joiners finished the stairs in the new building’ and on March 25 ‘the mason is doing the steps in the garden.\textsuperscript{15} Her main concern was the household accounts and all matters concerning the servants. Again, Justinian’s account book shows that he gave money to his wife to pay the household expenses:

\begin{itemize}
  \item 1731/2, 5 January to wife to pay Silvester half year’s wages £4 0s 0d.
  \item 17 March to my wife to pay the cook a half year’s wages £2 1s 91⁄2d.
  \item 14 October to my wife for housekeeping £5 1s.
  \item 13 November to my wife for housekeeping £10 1s.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{itemize}

Many letters between family members are concerned with finding places for girls from the village, as in this letter of 1733/4 from Mary at Lamport to her husband in London:

My dearest, Goody Palmer of the town was here last night, who has a daughter about thirteen years of age who had the misfortune to burn one of her thumbs when she was little, which made her incapable of doing hard work, therefore Goody Palmer desires her humble duty to you and if the money you have to put children to prentice is for girls as well as boys, she
would take it as a great favour if you would put the girl out as a prentice to a mantua-maker in Harborough. I told her I would write to you about it, perhaps it may be charity but you know the people’s circumstances better than I do …17

Other letters also mention local girls sent by the Isham family to be apprenticed to this mantua-maker in the nearby town of Market Harborough.

How did the ladies spend their time? When Mary, Elizabeth and Edmunda spent long periods in Bath each had different interests and pleasures. Mary would spend a few months there usually over the winter and with her mother for company, Justinian would often accompany his wife at the start of her visit, pay the subscription to the assembly rooms and the pumps and then leave her there, to return near the end of the visit. Sometimes she would travel alone using the Lamport coach, which she would send home and later send word for the coach to come for her return journey. She spent her days quietly in Bath, sometimes going to the assembly rooms but more often enjoying the company of neighbours from home, and writing frequent letters to her husband:

27 December 1732 … I have been out nowhere since you went, only with Colonel Robinson and his lady last Saturday to take the air and dined and supped and played at cards with them the same day, and also spent yesterday with them in the same manner …

and again in April 1733: ‘4 days I passed with the Knightley family and yesterday went with Mr Robinson and lady to Corsham … and yesterday went to that place again where are the Brixworth family, Miss Alicock of Lodddington and the Lamport Alicocks. 18 On 17th January she wrote – ‘spend my time chiefly in working, reading and walking, an old fashioned way which is more agreeable to Mrs I[sham] than in continual pursuit of what the world most esteems’

Reading would appear to have been her main pleasure as shown in a letter written two weeks later when most of the household was ill. ‘I am destitute of news now, seeing but little company though have some agreeable companions from Mr Leake [the bookseller], having read 4 books in quarto since you went. 19 She did not wish to patronise the coffee house where Bath visitors assembled to read the newspapers and write letters, so in her next letter she asked her husband ‘if it would not be too much trouble I should be glad if you would send Mrs I a weekly newspaper having sent to the coffee house here and they do not care to lend them out. 20

Edmunda was the only family member to visit Bath purely for the social scene, which she enjoyed with a friend from home, as in April 1737 ‘Mrs Knightley and I are generally out morning, noon and night.’ Her letters are full of the names of people she saw and mingled with in Bath society. In January 1750 she wrote to her brother – ‘Lord Chief Justice Hills plays at E.O. continually, as most everybody does and excessively high. I now and
then sport a little with humble skills. [This letter has social significance in that the gambling game of E.O. had been banned in 1745!]

Elizabeth (Figure 5) visited Bath in 1738 and wrote an interesting account to her husband of the perils of travel, lodging and her arrival.

Bath, the Bear Inn.
My dear, I believe you will be glad to hear we are well at Bath. We was in the coach yesterday by a quarter after seven and we could just get in before it was dark though we went through Lord Bathurst and the Duke of Beaufort's parks. The roads are very bad but we had no frights about them, but yesterday we was in danger of being robbed which fright me almost as much as if I had but the men kept close to each side the coach and being armed they was afraid. I don't find this place very full at present but a great many lodgings taken and the company not come. Had we been here on Tuesday as we first thought we had better lodgings. We have now those that Dr Hood had taken. It is a very good apartment to a garden very quiet as if we were in the country ... We lay here last night and dine here today on account of the servants being here, so then we shall pay and go home which is at Mr Ford's in Stall Street. The bells rang last night for my ladyship so I have begun to pay taxes ...

October had been disastrous for her social activities for on the occasion of the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales – 'here is to be great doings on Monday, we shall not be there. In the first place I am not gay enough to have tickets given me, in the next place have no clothes to go with.'

Members of the family would make frequent visits to friends and relatives in Oxford. Mary went there with her husband, Justinian, before their trip to Bristol Hot Wells and Bath in 1730. They stayed at the Angel and visited many acquaintances and relatives. 

Edmund wrote on 29th January 1735 to her brother Edmund and mentioned a proposed visit with friends to Oxford – 'Bro. Euseby was at Lamport during the baronet's stay and has invited a party of us to Oxford, that is sister Raynsford, the Allicocks and myself; we propose going Easter week ...' Afterwards she had the intention to visit her brother Edmund in London. In the same letter she also mentioned the local social scene with the parties held during visits to neighbouring families:

but was not at home ... being absent sometime in making visits to Loddington and Cramsey, where I spent my time most agreeably but when [unable to decipher] who made a very grand ball, St John Dolben was at it and two of the Mr Afflicks, and all the rest of the neighbourhood thereabouts, there was company enough for a complete ball and two tables of quadrille ...

Quadrille would seem to have been a favourite pastime for on another occasion in November 1731 Edmund wrote from Brixworth that there was much company with no time for anything besides Quadrille.

Another favourite occupation popular at that period was to visit great estates and their gardens. Elizabeth had recounted her visit to Lord Bathurst's and the Duke of Beaufort's parks in a letter, previously quoted, from Bath to her husband. Mary and Justinian liked to detour on their journeys to make such visits, as he noted in his diary for 18th July 1730: – 'at Middleton Stoney a village in Oxfordshire, near which we went to see a little box built by the late Sir Edmund Denton and afterwards purchased by Lord Carleton who improved the gardens.'

London also played a role in the families' lifestyle. Edmunda and Elizabeth started married life in Doctor's Commons as he was a judge in the High Court of Admiralty until his brother died in 1737 and he became the sixth

21. IC2532; IC2095.
22. IC2605.
23. IC2565.
24. IL2688.
25. IC3037.
27. IC2605.
28. IL2688.
baronet. Edmunda often went to 'town'; one such visit is detailed in a letter from brother Charles to Edmund in 1741/2 – '3 March … sister Munda designs to be in London Monday sennight. Gloucester Street will be her lodgings … Miss Cuthberts have taken places to come with her, so their maid and Munda’s makes five places and they say I’m to make the sixth place …'29

After their father died in May 1730, Vere, the eldest sister, left Lamport and eventually made her home in Twickenham, where she had been the previous April during a visit to London with friends.

I was so little time in town that I was in a continual hurry, for Mrs Knightley stayed but just a month and I was almost a week of that time at Twickenham with Lady Ferrers, who has a very pleasant place there. I saw all the Royal Family at the opera but had not the curiosity to go to Court, which Mrs Knightley did and was much distinguished there, for the Queen talked a great deal to her …30

At first she arranged to live with her brother Edmund (this was before his marriage) as she wrote in August to her brother Justinian from Watford, when she was still mourning her father:

I have been here a little over a week but believe I shall soon return to Fawsley. I only came here at present to avoid Warwick Races, where Mrs Knightley spent the most part of last week and as I have no taste at present for those diversions, I begged of her to excuse my going with her. I believe I shall stay at Fawsley till after the 1st. of September and then come here for a little time before I go to town, for I think I am now determined to fix at Doctor’s Commons.31

She was a little uncertain about the annuity she would receive and so delayed finding her own lodgings, but in 1733 Edmund wrote to his brother Justinian ‘26 May. I believe my sister [Vere] will remove to her house in Twickenham next week, it is now furnished to her mind and she likes it very well …’ and a few weeks later Vere wrote:

Twickenham, 19 June … the direction to me was in Montpellier row at Twickenham, Middlesex. I think it is a very pretty place and very quiet and retired, which suits very well with my inclinations. The court is now in our neighbourhood, but I believe I shan’t go there often … I was last Friday at the race, where there was a good deal of company …

The Lamport ladies obviously had no high opinion of shops in the neighbouring towns and appear to have made most of their purchases in London, often entrusting the commission to their husband or brother. An early letter from their mother Elizabeth, wife of the fourth baronet gives a fascinating insight into the kinds of commodity brought back:

Lamport. 28 March 1700 … All my things are gone up today … and in the box I have put two empty teapots to be filled. The last tea was very good as also the chocolate. All the fault I find is that Mr Bull don’t use you so well as when I buy myself, for I never gave him but three shillings for the chocolate and I believe tea may be had for twenty shillings a pound. Of what I most stood in need of for myself I never thought of till today which is a pair of stays.32

and a reminder followed on 6th April – ‘I hope you have not forgot the stockings …’

The sisters also required clothes from London and obviously were happy with their brother’s taste, as Edmunda wrote to Edmund in February 1731/2 – ‘sister Raynsford needs a new gown and petticoat … begs you would be so good to go to W. Tottman’s and choose her a paduasoy, either a full blue, or dark green, according which of the colours are the brightest or the best silk …’ Edmunda also asked her brother to settle her accounts for

29. IC2505.
30. IC2163.
32. IC1644.
purchases made in London. ‘April 1736/7
… for I desire, if the money will hold out
you’ll be so good as to pay Mr Montague for
two pairs of shoes. He lives at the Green
Dragon in Pall Mall.’

Food and other commodities were also
sent backwards and forwards, especially
between sister Raysford and Edmund. In
1731 from Edmunda to Edmund – ‘18
September … sister Raysford thinks herself
infinitely in your debt for the sturgeon you
was so kind to send her’ and the next month,
‘28 October … has sent up this week a ham-
per of meat, some gingerbread cakes and a
box where in is your holland for your
sheets…’ Fish were sent to Lamport and
the bill paid when a member of the family
was next in London, as shown in this letter
from Mary to her husband in 1734/5 … ‘I
have enclosed the fishmonger’s bill, which Mr
Pratt sent and desire you will please to pay
it …’

The death of the baronet was the occasion
for great upheavals in the family and letters
give insight into the protocol observed. Mary
was hesitant to leave their home in New
House and come immediately to her hus-
band at Lamport when his father died in
1730.

May 13. My dearest, It was with the great-
est concern I read the news of your good
father’s death and I am in such a fright. I
scarce know what to write. I send to know
if it is proper for me to come at the time
you mention (being before the funeral)
because I thought you might be in a hurry
when you wrote and if you would have
me come next Monday, how long you
would have me stay, yet I may order my
affairs accordingly and if I must come in
the coach, or hire a mourning one and if
you have me put the three under maids in
mourning …

Yet when Mary’s husband died in 1737 the
childless widow was very unwilling to leave
Lamport, inferring at first she was pregnant.

Letters from brother Edmund, now the sixth
baronet, at Lamport, to his wife Elizabeth at
Doctor’s Commons chart the course of her
departure.

9 March. … I venture to inscribe this letter
to you by the name of lady, for having met
Dr. Kimberley on the road coming from
my sister, he assured me he did not think
there was any reason to imagine that she
was with child, though there had been
some grounds of suspicion on account of
a disorder upon her which came about
seven months ago and continues still, but
he gives her medicine quite contrary to
which is usual to a woman with child …

10 March. … I have here a much larger
family than you have at Doctor’s
Commons. I found all the brothers and sis-
ters here except from Twickenham, and
with some others sit down a full table.
Lady Isham is much better than can be
expected; we had some conference since
the will was opened, she behaves herself in
an obliging manner and I believe we shan’t
differ … My lady talks about going away
pretty soon after the funeral, but perhaps
the disappointment in having the house
she thought of may retard her …

14 March. … My sister talks of going to
town in a fortnight, for many reasons that
I could mention. I don’t think it proper to
leave this place till she has gone …

19 March. … My lady says she intends to
go Monday before, therefore as I have
hope of seeing you here, I wish you would
set out on Thursday of that week, for I
don’t think it proper you should meet my
lady on the road …

20 March. … My lady went from hence
this day but does not propose to be in
London until Wednesday …

33. IC2531; IC2532.
34. IC3040; IC3038.
35. IC2064.
36. IC3031.
So Lady Mary left Lamport and eventually retired to Bath where she died in October 1744 and was buried, at her request, in Lamport church with her husband.

When the next baronet died childless in 1772, his nephew, the seventh baronet, had much greater problems to persuade his aunt, Sir Edmund’s second wife Philippa (Figure 6) to leave Lamport Hall, as the following polite correspondence illustrates:

To Sir Justinian Isham, Bart. at Wimpole Street, London.
Lamport, September 18, 1774. … Lady Isham desires to know if Sir Justinian will choose to reside at the mansion house at Lamport next summer and if it will be agreeable to him to rent the land she has for the remainder of the term …

written on the reverse side of this letter –

Sir Justinian presents his respects to Lady Isham … As Sir Justinian is resolved on taking some place in the country next summer, as thinking it so conducive to the health of his little family, it would certainly be more preferable and convenient to him to reside at Lamport, if Lady Isham chooses …

and so she agreed to go but after some bargaining –

Lamport. September 29
as Lady Isham feels Sir Justinian desirous of residing in the house next summer, she will relinquish it to him, expects he will allow her £20 for the land of which there are 134 acres besides gardens and courtyards and when she leaves the house, there will be several things to dispose of, such as ricks of hay, livestock, some hogsheads of strong beer and wine. When Sir Justinian has considered of this, desires he will let her know if he will treat with her for it, or any part of it …

The baronet’s will was of vital interest to the family, as provision for the widow and any unmarried daughters or sisters was of great importance. When the fourth baronet died in May 1730 there were two unmarried daughters to make provision for. Vere left Lamport and went to stay with friends but had to wait for her annuity:

July 21, 1730. Vere Isham from Fawsley to her brother Edmund.
My brother and sister were so kind when I came away to make me a present of the silver tea kettle and a pair of candlesticks but my annuity is not yet settled, my brother promises it shall be done but I find I must be content to wait his leisure for it …

and in 1734 she wrote to her brother, Sir Justinian –

I return you many thanks for sending my money and shall always acknowledge myself obliged to you. I have enclosed the receipts. I must own I cannot think my

42. IC2109.
43. IC2111.
44. IC1973.
father’s picture a good likeness, my mother’s is in my mind better and I should be glad if I could keep that without the other one …

The fifth baronet’s will was difficult to find:

After a long search we found a will … we were forced to break open several locks wanting the keys of the closets in the dressing room … he has left my sister five hundred pounds; all her jewellery, linen and such furniture as chests, cabinets etc. as she shall say is her own and the coach, chariot, and a set of horses and two saddle horses and all plate that has her arms upon it and not has his crest and has been exchanged for new …

and Mary was also paid a quarterly annuity of £200 by Sir Edmund.

As details of their 18th century lives emerge these documents reveal a lifestyle somewhat different to that enjoyed by many women in the 21st century. Their lives were more sheltered, they were denied many of the opportunities enjoyed by their men folk, such as formal education, career and foreign travel, yet they appeared to lead full and happy lives, normally centred around the framework of husband and family. Vere and Edmund, however, without any of these advantages, were able to lead a full and interesting live as individuals. The network of Northamptonshire county society formed the basis for their social interaction at Lamport, Bath and even London, so one could say that their life style was typical of their class and time at least in the Midland counties. These six women with very different characters come to life as individual members of a large, closely knit family and we see the interaction and friction between them, their problems of health, marriage and inheritance.

Acknowledgements:
My grateful thanks to Sir Ian Isham for his helpful comments and advice; to the Executive Director of the Lamport Hall Preservation Trust Ltd. for permission to photograph the portraits; and to the staff of Northamptonshire Record Office for the use of the Isham letters and diaries.

Quotations are taken from the Isham Collection of letters (I C), diaries and account books (I L) held at the Northamptonshire Record Office.

Portraits are from the Isham Collection at Lamport Hall.

Appendix
The Fourth Baronet and His Family


1. Elizabeth (1685) – three months.
2. Vere (1686-1760).
5. Edmund (1689) – one month.
   (2) in 1751 Philippa Gee (1707-1786).
7. Thomas (1691-1743).
8. Henry (1692) – five months.
12. Euseby (1697-1755).

The 'Lamport Ladies' are distinguished by bold print.
When Brownlow Cecil (1725–1793) succeeded at Burghley in 1755 he immediately brought in John Haynes, a York surveyor, to make plans of the house and gardens and a series of architectural drawings of all aspects and of the 1600 dower-house at Wothorpe. The drawing of the Inner Court at Burghley (Figure 1) is typical. Lancelot Brown was then employed for 23 years (1756–1779) at £1,000 per annum and undertook an extensive programme of architectural alterations and garden development. At first, the work force was employed by Brown who paid the workspeople and was reimbursed by the steward on demand. Cecil found this unsatisfactory and provided his own direct labour force to carry out the work.

Accordingly, a team of local masons of all grades was kept 'on the books.' After Brown was discharged in 1779 the Earl continued employment for a number varying between five and occasionally up to twelve or more. Payments per day varied from 2s 6d for master and banker masons; 1s 8d for rough masons and wallers; apprentices and boys 8d; and labourers 1s.

Some years in January and February there was little employment. Normally, they worked a six-day week, occasionally seven days. A Stamford attorney, James Hurst, supervised the

Figure 1: East aspect of the Inner Court, Burghley, by John Haynes, 1755.
accounts monthly and, in 1777, demanded that the steward should record what the masons were engaged upon each week. The response was reluctant but by the end of the year fairly regular entries were made.

In March 1772 – May 1773, a steward with a copybook hand made the entries and produced an entry for August 8th – 15th, when eight men were employed most weeks, ‘Men upon Gi … W orke’ and no payments were recorded (Figure 2). The undecipherable word must be Gist. Possibly the word may be a corruption of agist or agistment (the Cecils had extensive leases of Rockingham Forest lands) but the Earl should have paid his masons for any work done, unless it was for some form of manorial boon labour.

A complete extraction has been made of all entries defining work undertaken at the stated dates, with appropriate comment. About 70 percent of these entries relate to routine maintenance, including laying of pavements, stone floors in the House, repairs to the ornamental stacks and balustrades at roof level, as well as for labour-intensive constructions such as stone horse-troughs, garden rollers and seats and work done at the manorial tenements in Stamford and the surrounding country. The remaining 30 percent of entries mostly relate to major works at the House, usually well-recorded from other sources such as the Day and Cash books, contracts, correspondence and bills.

The following section is arranged under consecutive years and records work not known from other sources (apart from the Grand Staircase).

1777 March–November. Intermittent work variously described as ‘putting in the blank windows – putting in the mullion of the windows – about the windows – waling up windows – stoping up windows’ and (October 4th) ‘walling up windows in the Old hall.’

1778 April – May. Six weeks work ‘about the windows on the West Front’. Windows at ground floor level are shown occluded in Haynes’ plan of 1755 and Brown’s of 1756, both in the south–west turret and the adjacent façade.

1779 February. Work commenced on the Grand Staircase, a considerable task that made leisurely progress until 1786 when the iron balustrades and mahogany hand rails were fitted. An associated construction took place in the south–east turret at the foot of the staircase where a water closet was installed.

1780. In April comes the first entry of ‘cuting the windows’; in May they were ‘cuting the windows and helping the joiners from London’. Fell and Newton, a London firm of cabinetmakers, were fitting out the suite of Staterooms known from the 17th century as the George Rooms and were employed by the Ninth Earl and his successor over a long period. At this time they were installing small...
sashed windows and the masons were cutting deep channels in the mullions and stone window frames to act as ‘pockets’ to accommodate the counterweights. Other periods of this chiselling came in 1779 and 1781. It was of course bad practice and in c.1990 the weakened mullions were cracking and needed removal.

1781. In February, scaffolding was put up inside the Great Hall and Ketton ashlar was being dressed for ‘hall windows;’ the masons spent the rest of the year in almost continuous work in the Great Hall. The main work was window-blocking at the inner aspect and it should be realised that large windows high in the north and south gables were also occluded. Included in this complete overhaul was six weeks work on the Serlio chimney-piece which was ‘pulled down’ and rebuilt, using new Ketton stone in part. Early in this operation is a note that they were ‘cleaning the lowson chimneys.’ This may refer to the double flues, presumably installed to improve updraught.

In July they were ‘at Ketton pits getting the large stone home for old hall.’ This can only be a replacement halfpace (hearth) for the vast Serlio chimney-piece. The window blocking was completed by August and in September they were taking down the colonnade at the north end of the Great Hall - six paired columns, according to the 1755 Haynes plan. The central ‘arch’ at the back was repaired, the ‘neaches’ were cleaned and the scaffolding taken down on October 27th.

1782. Finally, on January 5th comes the entry ‘going to Ketton pits getting stone in’ and ‘covering hall floor.’ The last entry in the ledger on October 12th is ‘at the aw aw wall’ but there is no indication of the site which is either the ha-ha protecting the south-west garden down to the lake or that running east from the south gate.

The most interesting entries in the ledger are those relating to the wholesale occlusion of windows down the east side of the Great Hall. The gigantic diagonal buttresses at the south east corner of the hall and at the north east termination of the east range where the ground falls away in the chestnut courtyard are not shown in the John Thorpe plan of 1606,\(^3\) nor any of the lesser buttressing along the east side. Thorpe shows continuous fenestration. All the present buttressing is shown in the Haynes plan of 1755 and the only east fenestration open is that of the large rectangular bay.

Lancelot Brown’s masterplan of 1756 ‘showing the proposed alterations,’ demonstrates that he proposed to move the Serlio chimney-piece across to the west wall of the hall and insert a window in the place of the flues and stack; also re-opening old blocked fenestration south of the rectangular bay and north of the original site of the chimney-piece. Cecil would not agree to move the chimney-piece but did not veto the windows. The vastly improved lighting showed off the glories of the double hammer beam trusses and took the eye upwards on entry. The stability of the hall must have been threatened on two separate occasions: the first (unrecorded) in the 17th century which led to the very heavy buttressing and occlusion of windows.

Brown was paid £500 six-monthly via Drummonds Bank, the last regular payment being in February 1777. Then £150 in July 1777; no payments in 1778, and a payment on April 23rd, 1779 of £214 5s 5d by J.W. Clark, the Earl’s trusted steward, marked in red ink ‘in full of his bill’ which always indicated dispute and a refusal to consider the matter any further.

From March-October 1777 the ledger shows continuous work in walling up hall windows from the outer aspect and with scaffolding in the hall, from February to August 1781. There was still architectural work to be done – he was sending designs for the Grand Staircase in 1781-2 when work had already started under the Lincoln surveyor, Thomas Lumby. Also the garden development was incomplete and the lake not filled. Clearly there was a terminal difference\(^4\) and a


4. Exeter Muniment 51/46 shows that a hundred years later there was knowledge of this. It is a copy of p.73 of the private ledger of Lancelot Brown, furnished on request by ‘W. L. Frazer, Bt.’ In 1886.
strong suspicion that the east side of the Great Hall had threatened collapse. As the architectural alterations in and about Burghley House neared completion, the Earl commenced an extensive programme of rebuilding the south-east section of Stamford Manor using Thomas Lumby’s simple designs in Stamford ashlar and Wothorpe coursed rubble. The building continued without pause until his death in 1793, after three years of failing health from prostatic obstruction.

For the better understanding of this ledger, some account of the Ninth Earl is necessary. In 1748, he married Letitia Townsend, only daughter of Horatio Townsend. Her portrait by Hudson is of an icy beauty. The marriage was childless and her sudden death in 1756 was recorded by Horace Walpole as due to erysipelas and septicaemia. Her portion was £70,000 and Walpole states that with her jointure she brought a total of £100,000 to Burghley but in the absence of any issue, as a

6. ‘A St Anthony’s Fire that struck in and seized her brain.’

Figure 3: Brownlow Cecil, Ninth Earl of Exeter by Angelica Kaufmann.

7. T. C. Cecil married Charlotte Gornier, according to Horace Walpole; ‘a Columbine belonging to the playhouse in Brussels’.

The gross income of the estates averaged £21,000 and the Earl was able to run his finances like an old-fashioned investment trust, geared to £60,000 of loans and mortgages, 20-30 percent at low rates within the family. He had a good accountant who supplied 5-year averages, demonstrating that he was only failing to balance by £380 a year (‘expended too much yearly’). He rented a London house in Lower Grosvenor Street and had an elastic arrangement for carriage and horse hire when in London. He was rarely seen at Court but often at concerts, Handel Festivals and baroque opera.

His commonplace book reveals that he received tuition in the rudiments of music and at the time of his death, he possessed three organs. From 1785, he gave elaborate concerts at Burghley using such divas as ‘Madame Mara,’ a German soprano engaged by Frederik II for life, and from whom the Earl parted with tears in 1791. Although he avoided involvement in national affairs, he maintained a tight hold on Stamford’s two parliamentary seats (it was a rotten borough) and with the Gainsborough family also controlled the two Rutland seats. In political circles they were known as the Confederacy.

His only significant anxiety lay in the succession. His younger brother, T. C. Cecil, was a reckless spendthrift in heavy debt for his entire adult life and compelled to live in the Netherlands. In 1754, the Earl took the only child of his marriage as an infant of ten months, to be adopted and educated in England. In 1771, writing to Lord Hardwicke about a shared tutor, he could say of his nephew ‘My heart and soul is wrapt up in the boy’.

On succession in 1754, Lord Exeter had to wait until the Seven Years War was over before he could travel but he was in Italy for two years from August 1763; he returned in 1768 for two years and again in 1774. Mostly centred in Rome, he also stayed in Venice, Florence and Naples. Accounts exist of his
careless dress and informal habits. He had audience of Pope Clement XIV and presents were exchanged. He collected paintings and artefacts on all his journeys and employed the usual agents of the period, including Thomas Jenkins. On a dozen occasions between 1760 and 1793, he made gifts to the British Museum of a wide variety including statuary, medals, coins, books of drawings and furniture.

Sir William Hamilton, consul at Naples, kept a close eye upon the activities of the English families in Italy. He reported the arrival of Lord Exeter at Florence on 25th October, 1768 ‘with a family’ including his young cousin Sophia Aufrere who married Charles Anderson Pelham (later Lord Yarborough) after a lightning courtship in 1770. In the same year, the Gentlemen’s Magazine announced the marriage of the widower Earl of Exeter to Ann Maria Cheatham, daughter of Job Cheatham, of Sodor Hall, North Yorkshire. Neither at Burghley nor Sodor can any documentation be found relating to this event and it must be presumed that the bride died suddenly whilst still abroad. The Earl returned on 29th June 1770 alone via Dover.

Brownlow Cecil was a modern man. He employed such contemporary artists as Benjamin West and Angelica Kaufmann, of whom he was an active patron (Figure 3). She stayed at Burghley for long periods and was very popular with family and staff. The steward (accountant) in his cash-books refers to her as ‘Mistress Angelica.’ Lancelot Brown’s architectural designs were always submitted 11.

Figure 4: Burghley: the Garden Gateway of 1778.

Figure 5: Gate of Virtue in east range, Caius Court, Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge.


in several forms for Cecil’s decision – the height of the Gothick doors in the stables-coach house ranges; the use of balustrades, strapwork cresting and ornamentation of the south range; alternative two- and three-arch designs for the Palladian bridge.

Brown’s masterplan of 1756 shows that he intended that the library should occupy much of the space in the north-west wing, but by 1760, the whole wing had vanished without replacement. Cecil fitted out the range of state-rooms on the first floor of the south range. Apart from the First George Room, and Verrio’s decorative paintings, they had remained untouched since the death of the 5th Earl, in 1700. The Ninth Earl took pains to marry his work to his great grandfather’s baroque overdoors and elaborate wooden cornices. He selected for his carvers simple repetitive designs of flowers and foliage derived from *The Ruins of Palmyra*. 12

The light colour of the large fields of Norway oak panelling was a problem treated then and through the 19th century by periodic painting with strong ale. 13

Mayhew and Ince provided very expensive furniture in 1768 and onwards and it is consistent with his antiquarian inclinations that Cecil should provide large quantities of old Dutch floral marquetry for incorporation into the suite of box commodes and encoignures. 14

In December, 1777 the masons were ‘dressing stone for a Gateway at the Walnut Trees’; 15 clearly a banker job for the winter months. They assembled it intermittently the following summer and finished it in October, 1778 (Figure 4). On January 2nd 1779, comes Wm. Peesgood’s (a half retired mason) expenses to Cambridge to ‘examine a Gateway there and take a plan of it: £1:19’.


15. The Walnut Paddock contained many large trees that were only felled c.1958.


17. David Loggan *Cantabrigia Illustrata*, 1690, a map and twenty six engravings of Cambridge.

Significantly the gate is constructed in Ketton oolite but the building stone for the House is King’s Cliffe ashlar. 16 In style it is of the mid-16th century - on both aspects, simple Doric pilasters without plinths, and free-standing strapwork above with four obelisks at the corners. It is inserted into the garden wall, which is of coursed Wothorpe rubble, leaving straight joints at the sides. Extensive search at Cambridge, at first unsuccessful, eventually led to Caus Court, 1565-1575 and undertaken by Dr. John Caius who died before its completion. Incorporated in the east range is the Gate of Virtue (Figure 5) and in the south range, the Gate of Honour (Figure 6). Due east of the Gate of Virtue, across the Tree Court and opening into Trinity Street was a much simpler structure, the Gate of Humility. The trio formed a typical Elizabethan allusive conceit. Unlike Virtue and Honour, Humility has suffered
great change. David Loggan\textsuperscript{7} shows it in situ at the right margin of his engraving of 1690. He had a reputation for accuracy in his work, but shows a featureless flat coping above the frieze. A print of 1844 shows the east aspect in Trinity Street with free-standing broken volutes above (Figure 7). By 1815 it was much weathered and was refaced with Roman cement. In 1868, it was moved to its present position in the south wall of the Master's Garden. The north side (Figure 8) has Corinthian side-pilasters, the south side (Figure 9) is in Roman Doric; there is a 19th-century scrolled cresting. The surface has been entirely renewed.\textsuperscript{18} The scrolling is not free standing, clearly modern and has a curiously concessionary appearance, as if noting the previous existence of a more defined decoration. Although the Burghley gateway is only similar to the redressed Humility, I have little doubt that this was the exemplar. The Earl would not consider the use of different orders and expensive decoration for an unimportant garden entrance to a shrubbery and menagerie. From the Lord Treasurer's period, Stamford had strong connections with St. John's and Brownlow Cecil during his undergraduate years would know well the

\textsuperscript{17} ‘The City of Cambridge’ RCHM, 1959, part 1, p.81.

Figure 7: Humility in situ from Trinity Street, Cambridge, in 1844.

Figure 8: Humility ex situ in south wall of the Master's Garden; north aspect.
central block of the college architecture and its tradition.

During his long reign at Burghley, Cecil often awarded on tender, complete responsibility for particular works to two or three master masons – usually Thomas Manton or John & Robert Hames. Their payments would not go through the masons wages ledger but were settled by the steward, John Clarke through the general estate cash and day books. Accordingly, I had been aware for 30 years of a strange entry under March 15th, 1782, 'Thomas Manton, mason, for stone and workmanship for a new gateway to a pattern of gateway at the Fryars in Stamford Field: £20:5:6.' A crude drawing exists of this gateway (Figure 10) by William Stukeley the antiquary, in a book of designs mostly relating to Stamford, which he intended to publish.19

William Cecil had acquired most of the derelict monastic buildings around Stamford by 1556 and demolished them for the Barnack ashlar; the stone was removed to

19. I am grateful to Mr. J. F. Smith for this information. The book is the property of the Rutland and Stamford Historical Society and is deposited at Lloyds TSB, Stamford. The Whitefriars layd immediately east of the town wall by Brazenose Lane; the Greyfriars (known as the Far Friars), laid a quarter mile farther east. By the 18th century, the two had become confused and Stukeley’s title of Greyfriars is wrong.

Figure 9: Humility south aspect with heavy plinth and Roman Doric Pilasters.

Figure 10: William Stukeley’s drawing (1735) of the Whitefriars Gateway, Stamford.
Burghley but very little seems to have been used there. The south entrance was not demolished and was recorded by Stukeley in 1735. The east jamb still persists in situ as large blocks of shelly, grey Barnack stone in a garden wall in Priory Road.

Elizabeth Cecil (1729-1813), younger sister of the Ninth Earl, married John Chaplin of Blankney in 1757. He died in 1764, leaving male issue. By 1782, the succession was still uncertain, for Henry Cecil had a marriage without male issue. His sister’s child became important to the Earl, who fitted out a house at Glaiston (near Uppingham) for the widow, spending £1,000 on slating, general repairs and furniture.

On April 6th, 1782 the recently discovered masons wages ledger contains a terse entry ‘Loading stone for Glaiston.’ This must be the banker work prepared during the winter by Thomas Manton. The house was demolished at the end of the 19th century and no trace of the gateway remains.

Before his discharge in 1779, ‘Capability’ Brown supplied an elevation for a banqueting house. It was a truncated form of the Tudor building at Chipping Campden. On January 31st, 1786 the Day books record a payment of £4 9s 6d to Robert Hames as ‘expenses to Campden in Gloucestershire’ and on March 19th, 1787 a payment of £267 to ‘John & Robert Hames for building the New Pavilion in the garden at Burghley’ (Figure 11).

Brownlow Cecil died on December 26th 1793 and by that time the fitting out and furnishing of the State Rooms was almost completed and 27 tenements had been rebuilt in Stamford Manor, all without significant impoverishment of his estate. He lived with assurance through the closing years of the golden age of the aristocracy and died before the impact of revolutionary France and the Napoleonic Wars.

Acknowledgements
I am grateful to Mr. J. E. Smith for transport and aid at Cambridge and Glaiston and for photography of Figures 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10. To the Master of Gonville and Caius and Dr. Paul Binski; to Mr. Tony Baggs and Professor Andrew Saint; and as always to Mr. Jon Culverhouse.
Until his death in 1997 Stanley Herbert West had farmed 369 acres at Manor Farm, Newton Bromswold. He moved there in 1935, being a tenant farmer until 1960 when he bought it. The auction for 'the productive mixed farm' was conducted in the Conservative Club in Bletchley on Monday 10th of October. The auctioneers, W. S. Johnson & Co., had been instructed by Lloyds Bank the administrators of the estate of Hedley Joseph Clarke who, until his death, had been my father's landlord.

Sorting through the paperwork after my father's death, we found a 1973 letter from a fellow of St Peter's College, Oxford, who had wanted to excavate the site of Newton medieval village, part of which is close to the farmhouse. In the letter the site was described as 'one of the best sites ... seen ... it is archaeologically valuable in that, unlike most, it has never been under the plough.' My father had refused permission at the time, as someone had told him that there would be 'crowds' of people both professional and amateur descending on the farm to excavate. This letter sparked the curiosity as to who had owned the manorial land at Newton Bromswold and Higham Ferrers over the centuries, finding out if possible in the process, the site of the original manor house. I thought that as the village is small, consisting of just under 900 acres, it was unlikely that ownership of the land would have been shared by more than four or five landlords over the years.

My research took me first to the Northamptonshire County Council Sites and Monuments office where I obtained copies of three aerial photos of the site of the medieval village, around which the existing village is clustered. These photographs also showed that an area in the fields opposite the present farmhouse is, in all probability, where an Iron Age settlement had been. A reconstructed map of the open fields was intriguing in that a field the family had always called Kennel Pit was referred to as Kelling Pit.¹

A visit to the County Record Office showed that the task of tracing the land-owners appeared to be easily completed by information contained in the *Victoria County History* which showed the ownership of the manorial land from 1086 to the 19th century as follows:²

The name Bromswold seems to refer to the 'Bruneswald,' a large area of woodland on the borders of Hunting-don and Northamptonshire, in which Hereward and his men took refuge at the beginning of his rise against the Normans.

The Manor [consisting of] two hides less half a virgate which Azor had formerly held in Newton, [was] in 1086 held by the Bishop of Coutances by William, his steward. This estate descended with the manor of Cotes Bidun to John de Gatesden, who with Richard Croxton was holding of the heirs of Baldwin Wake half a fee in Newton in 1284. Gatesden's representative, Richard Chamberlain, in 1428 held half a fee in Cotes and Newton 'of the fee of John Bidon.'

As early as 1166 Richard de Neuton and 'another Richard of the same vill' were holding a fee in Newton of John de Bidun and other members of the family occurred in connection with the advowson until the end of the 13th century, but in 1346 John Druell was in possession. On the death of a later John Druell in 1496 the manor descended to his younger brother Richard. Richard died in 1525 leaving Newton to his wife Grace, after whose death it was to be sold and the proceeds devoted to the maintenance of a chantry in the Fraternity of the Gild of Jesus in Baldock. This was possibly done when

Figure 1: Archaeological survey of Newton Bromswold earthworks, 1972. Manor Farm is at the south, plot 1. Plot 2 is the dovecote, and the cover illustration of this journal is taken from north of plot 36 looking south. (David Hall)
lands in Newton Bromswold were sold by his eldest daughter, and ultimately, sole heir Anne and her husband Robert Warner to Thomas Brooke, who held them at his death in 1558.

Half of the manor was in the hands of Francis Negus in 1639, and... half was confirmed to him in 1644 by William Negus and his wife Jane, whose inheritance it evidently was. Francis Negus and his wife Susan sold the manor of Drewell's [from Druell who owned in 14th century] in 1644 to Needham Langhorne, who settled it on William Langhorne in 1661. Fourteen years later a moiety of the manor was owned by Thomas Wileman and his wife Anne.

Edward Disborough and Edward Cromwell Disborough made a settlement of a third of the manor in 1811. Later in the 19th century Newton Bromswold came into the possession of Frederick Urban Sartoris of Rushden Hall in whose family it remains.

The ownership by the Sartoris family was an important part of the history as they had built the present farmhouse sometime between 1856 and 1893 and we have deeds relating to their ownership at Manor Farm. Tracing the ownership of the land in the Victorian History had not satisfied my curiosity however. There seemed to be gaps, and it was just a list of names to me. I wanted, if possible, to find out a little more about these past landlords and tenants.

A clue was at Manor Farm itself. Over the doorway of one of the old farm buildings, a large stone bears the inscription 'Jacob Hunt Esq. 1790.' Who was Jacob Hunt? According to the Victorian History he never owned any of the manorial land – possibly it could have been the builder who wished to be remembered in future centuries.

At the Northamptonshire Record Office search for the name 'Jacob Hunt' in the Newton Bromswold index found reference to him. On the 6th November 1786 'Jacob Hunt, a gentleman of Huntingdon' had leased from Jonathan Hethercoat, John Griggs and his wife Alice 'a mansion house 3 closes and 4 cottages.' The mansion house sounded impressive. There must have been a house of substantial size at that time to be described thus. Further research showed Jacob Hunt appearing in documents relating to the manorial land in 1771 and evidence that he actually bought the land.

At Huntingdon County Record Office it was revealed that Jacob Hunt of the parish of St Benedict, was the Mayor of Huntingdon in 1779 and 1787. He married Jane Cousins on the 16th of July 1765. So Jacob Hunt did own part of the manorial land, but for some reason did not appear in the Victoria History, neither did the Hethercoats. At Northampton the Sartoris family file was consulted to see if Jacob Hunt was mentioned in any of their documents.

Deeds proved that there was a sale by Joseph Hunt of 190 acres of freehold for £3,700 to Mr. Frederick Urban Sartoris in 1856. Elsewhere in the Sartoris file, the name Joseph Hunt appeared several times so possibly Jacob and Jane had a son who inherited at least part of the farm while he was living in Addlethorpe in Lincolnshire, but this fact has still to be confirmed.

3. NRO YZ 4134.
4. NRO S(R) 314.

Figure 2: Inscription on a stone barn at Manor Farm, Jacob Hunt Esq. 1790 (Geraldine Hunt)
The land owned by the Mayor of Huntingdon was surveyed in 1801 by Messrs Jenkinson & Lovell. A crest on the map showed that a Johnson Allen (spelt Johnston in some records) and his wife Elizabeth had been his tenants at this time. Johnson and Elizabeth Allen’s gravestone, almost entirely obscured in ivy, lies in Newton Bromswold churchyard. At the time of the 1851 census his son, also called Johnson, was 56 years old and his wife Mary Ann aged 49 and it appeared that the tenancy had passed to them. They had 11 children, seven sons and four daughters, the gravestone of one son Charles, who died at 19 is still legible. Members of the Allen family were still in the village in 1866 as the banns of marriage were published between James Allen, then 38 and Emma of Yelden. Emma’s surname is unclear, only showing —ilton in the records.

From the 1871 census the tenancy of Manor Farm was held by Ebenezer and Harriet Sykes whose daughter later married James Harris. James was tenant of 193 acres of Manor Farm in 1881, and his descendants still farm in the village. These scraps of information began to build up a picture, albeit still faint, of some of the families who had walked and farmed the land up to two centuries before my father.

The map dated 1801 in the Sartoris file, showed that the land purchased from Joseph Hunt was for the most part that on the same side of the road as the present farmhouse, only two fields being on the opposite side. Although all these fields were nearly the same acreage as the present ones, many of the names were different from those that the West family has always used. The field we called the paddock, where there are medieval humps and hollows, was Dovehouse Close, taking its name obviously from the dovehouses which were once in this area, certainly in Jacob Hunt’s time, and before. Other field names on the map were, Upper Balk Close, Lower Balk Close, Long Furlong, Home Close, Foxholes Meadow, Long Meadow, Common Close, Rickyard Close, Garebroad Close, Old meadow, Kellam Pit Close, Three Cornered Close, and Backside Close, the latter two being the ones across the road from the farmhouse. Home Close and Foxholes were the only two names which were the same as those still in use by the family.

The map also showed the old road that used to run through from the village, continuing on from Church Lane, alongside the pond at Manor Farm (which the Wests always
referred to as the moat) to about where the farm buildings are now. The depression along the side of the hedges in this area are all that remain of the old road which would, most probably, have still been in use right up until the time the present house was built.

On the map, Newton Road still had its medieval name of Backside Lane. Our Kennel Pit, and the 1800 Kelling Pit Furlong was Kellam Pit Close, so I was even more intrigued to know which was the original name. One theory, gleaned from the Land Tax records of 1779 is that this small area was owned by a Mr Kellam. Could it have been referred to as ‘Kellam’s bit’ originally, the name changing through word of mouth and pronunciation? Ownership names shown on the land belonging that belonging to Jacob Hunt were John Bollard, William Bollard, Arthur Borron and the Rector’s allotment. Members of the Bollard family were declared bankrupt. William in 1781 and in 1799 William and John Bollard were ‘seized jointly of land in Newton Bromswold paying William Borron for his share.5

The other fields my father owned, across the road from the present house, and those beyond Kellam Pit Close, Garibroad Close and the old meadow, and also that in Higham Parish, a total of 177 acres, were shown in another document dated 1856 when Mr. Sartoris bought it from Messrs. King, Ward and Burnaby (trustees of Reverend Robert Outlaw’s will) for £3,046. The names of these fields were Bottom Close, Dairy Close, Bush Close, Footpath Close, Cartroad Close, Joint Close, Little Sheepfold, Top Close, and Great Sheepfold. Again, none of these names is used now, but Dairy Close is Dairy Field, so its old name has not changed too much. The total acreage of these two sales is 367 - almost the exact acreage my father farmed during his 62 years in Northamptonshire.

The names of the fields in the Parish of Higham were Old Leys (No Man’s Leys before enclosure), The Buscotts and Glebe Piece. Buscotts had always been referred to as such by my family (but pronounced differently which made me think it was spelt Busketts). Glebe Piece and the Leys were not names we were familiar with. That land has always been referred to as Moonshine. This remains a mystery, as I have yet to see it referred to by its present name in any documents or on any maps. Perhaps my father had given it this imaginative name. This pocket of land in Higham Ferrers holds further mysteries, as Buscotts is thought to be either the site of another ancient village or, more probably an isolated manor. Certainly pieces of pots, roof tiles and other antiquities have been found:

The area of a deserted village and its fields has sometimes produced an irregular shape, usually a protuberance in the parish to which it has been amalgamated, and thus the area of enquiry is narrowed … Yet there are also protuberances which seem to have been isolated manors and not villages, such as the areas centred on Buscott in Higham Ferrers …

5. NRO YZ 4137.
6. NRO YZ 4138.
Before collating all the information gathered, reference was made to Bridges’ History tracing the ownership of the land in Newton Bromswold until the middle of the 16th century. This showed some details differing slightly from the Victoria County History, one being the inclusion of the name Lamb (Lambe in some documents) in the ownership. An entry in the Northampton County Magazine is still a mystery. It tells of William Smith of Newton ‘A Youthful Mayor.’

In 1654 William Smith according to his own account was born at Weld Hall, Newton, near Higham Ferrers. His father was country squire, his mother, whose name has not been preserved, had been Maid of Honour to Queen Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles 1st.

Another article titled, ‘The Virginia Washingtons and Newton Bromswold,’ told more about Needham Langhorne, shown in the Victorian history, as purchasing the land in 1644 ‘from Francis Negus and Susan his wife.’ For just £200 the purchase consisted of: the whole manor of ‘Drewells’ alias Newton Bromswold… with two messuages, one cottage, one dovecote, two gardens, two orchards, a hundred and twenty acres of land, eight acres of meadow, and sixteen acres of pasture in Newton Bromswold aforesaid. The old manor-house at Newton became henceforward the family seat…”

Was it possible that the dovecote was the same one still standing in Dovehouse Close (the field which the West family called The Paddock) when Jacob Hunt was the owner? The article revealed that Needham Langhorne was the maternal grandfather of Mary Washington and her sister Frances Dade who on their grandfather’s death succeeded jure uxoris to part of the manorial estate in Northamptonshire. The testator had previously transferred the entire estate to his son William Langhorne in 1661 but William

and his elder sister must have died without issue, so indirectly part of the estate passed to the granddaughters. Their inheritance was ‘two messuages, two gardens, two orchards, a hundred and twenty six acres of land, fourteen acres of meadow, and thirteen acres of pasture with common of pasture for all beasts.’

Mary Langhorne married Robert Townsend at Newton Bromswold on 6th April 1665 and their daughter Mary (later to marry John Washington) was baptised at Newton Bromswold on the 15th July 1669. Needham Langhorne was buried at Newton on 19th August 1673 showing that he was not an owner who lived elsewhere, as did Jacob Hunt. Mary’s husband Capt. John Washington, and her brother-in-law Francis Dade came to England in 1697, ‘in order to dispose of their wives’ English possessions.’ The article further reveals that ‘Capt. John is known to have acted as guardian of George Washington’s father, Augustine, during the latter’s minority.’

This information certainly added some colour to the list of names. It also appeared to add yet another name to the list of owners, one Geoffrey Jefferyes (an eminent London merchant) who ‘acquired the remaining moiety of the manor of Newton Bromswold from Francis Dade and Captain John Washington.’ Needham Langhorne was thought to be a direct descendent of the Wests, Lords De la Warr. Chambers’ Biographical Dictionary notes that ‘Thomas West 1577–1618 was a soldier and colonist who after serving under Robert, 2nd Earl of Essex, was appointed the first Governor of Virginia in 1610. Returning in England in 1611 he wrote the Relation on Virginia. He died on a return voyage to Virginia. The state of Delaware is named after him. It would seem from this evidence that Needham Langhorne of Newton Bromswold, could already have had relatives in Virginia before his granddaughter married into the Washington family, indeed visiting relatives in Virginia is how Mary Townsend probably met her future husband.

Information in the last paragraph of the Washington article states that after 1709 ‘the history of the Newton Bromswold estate is obscure’ and although in 1811 a third of the manor was owned by Edward Cromwell Disborough, ‘no real information is available until the middle of the last century’ when Frederick Urban Sartoris bought it. Here the name Lambe appears (as in the Bridges history) found on an inscription in the church to commemorate a member of that family:

Sacred to the memory of H Lambe who died March 24, 1727. A person equal to all in probity who always behaved as an --- of the married life, an indulgent parent, no severe master, a courteous friend to all never refusing his help to anyone in real want, sincere in his devotions. A strenuous patron of the church of England. Alexander Lambe, his only son hath erected.

A note in the burial records state ‘received for his mortuary 10 shillings, and 6s 8d for being buried in the church.’ On the floor of the church are more references to the Lambe family; Susanna Lambe widow of H. Lambe daughter of Thos E. of Twywell 20th November 1711, and also Alexander, died 17th April 1732 aged 23. Here is revealed the owner of at least a part of the manorial land during some of those years (1709 to 1856) when, according to the article, ownership was ‘obscure.’ In the Record Office a Latin deed, dated 1715, was marked ‘380 acres 2 dovecotes’. The parties involved were Richard Cox and John Underwood.

In a document dated 1756–57 referring to land at Newton Bromswold again the name H. Lamb (without an ‘e’) appears and included land not only in Newton Bromswold and Higham Ferrers but also in Wollaston and Yelden. This land contained 10 barns, 10 stables, 5 malthouses, 6 dovecouses, 10 gardens, 10 orchards 600 acres of land and 100 acres of meadows, 100 acres of pasture and common land. Presumably, if the commemorative inscription in the church was dated 1727, then members of the Lamb family owned at least part of the manorial land around 1709-1765. More evidence substantiated this from information dated 8th February 1765,

9. NRO YZ 5229.
10. NRO YZ 4130 & 4144.
11. NRO YZ 4147.
being a conveyance of land in Newton Bromswold and Higham for £2,200, by trustees of the will of Mary Atkinson Ferrers, giving the information that Mary's grandfather was Robert Lambe who lived in the mansion house.12

The name Lambe appears yet again on 27th Feb 178113 when Edward Lambe (solicitor) was involved in the commission of bankruptcy against William Bollard, but of course this does not necessarily mean that it is the same family. The evidence does prove that for a number of the middle years of the 18th century the manorial land was definitely owned by the Lambe family and then after 1765 was owned by Jonathan Hethercoat and John Griggs and then Jacob Hunt.

The name Disborough mentioned in the Victoria County History, could possibly be the same shown as Disbrowe on a map of Newton Bromswold farms dated 1832. At that time the land in the village was owned by the Reverend [Robert] Outlaw, Earl Fitzwilliam, Wiles and Disbrowe, and Jacob Hunt.14

As stated, in 1786 Jacob Hunt owned at least 190 acres of the manorial land, and the Lord of the Manor at the time of the 1800 Inclosure was John Bollard, William Bollard and Arthur Borron15. As established earlier, these names had appeared on the map dated 1801 found in the Sartoris file, their land (177 acres) bordering that belonging to first Jacob Hunt and later to his son Joseph. It would seem that the land owned by these three gentlemen eventually became the property of Reverend Robert Outlaw, as we have seen that it was sold by his trustee's to F.U. Sartoris in 1856, the same year that Mr. Sartoris purchased 190 acres from Joseph Hunt. In 1874 land that had not been sold to Mr. Sartoris was leased by the Reverend R. Outlaw to W. Dunton for nine years.16 The name Bollard appeared frequently in baptisms from the middle to the end of the 18th century and the family certainly owned land in Newton Bromswold from the 1760s. Further reference to the Bollard family occurs in the Northamptonshire Militia Lists of 177717 (Hatley 1977). William and John Bollard are two of the 16 persons eligible, a note at the bottom of the list showing that William Bollard was also constable. It was also interesting to see that the Bollard family and the Negus family were joined in matrimony in 1774 when William Bollard (widower) and Ann Negus married. The Negus family (sometimes spelt Negos) were residents in Newton Bromswold before being shown as owners of land in 163918, and burials of members are shown as early as 1577 and 1585, marriages and christenings in 1563 in church records. Members of the Lambe family were christened as early as 1672 so their connection with the manorial land could have been as early as 1709.

To return to the article about the Washington connection, however, an intriguing statement was ‘Of the ancient manor-house, once the residence of Needham Langhorne ... even the residence for a brief space of the Washingtons, not a single stone remains.' In what part of Newton Bromswold would the Manor House have been at the time the land was owned by Needham Langhorne? Could it have been situated somewhere near the present farmhouse? Where could an investigation into its probable siting begin? The description of the farmhouse when, along with land, Jacob Hunt bought it from Jonathan Hethercoat, John Griggs and his wife Alice was 'Mansion house.' It was also referred to as such when the Lambe family were owners and the mansion house and estate of Newton Bromswold is again mentioned on the conveyance between Oliver and John Wright and William and Edward Bollard dated 5th April 1769.19 Could the old Manor House and the Mansion house be one and the same, and situated at Manor Farm? Information in the Sartoris file offered another piece of evidence.

12. NRO YZ 4130.
13. NRO YZ 4153.
14. NRO YZ 7173.
15. NRO Newton, Enclosure Enrolment Volume K, p.327.
16. NRO YZ 4136.
18. VCH iv, p.27.
19. NRO YZ 4164.
In 1893 in order to obtain a mortgage for his marriage settlement trustees, the land and houses in Newton Bromswold owned by F. U. Sartoris, was valued by Pendered and Son. The letter was worded thus:

12th May 1893
We have made a careful inspection of the undermentioned Freehold property belonging to Herbert Sartoris Esq.
Viz. A newly erected farm house with garden and the old farm house and homestead adjoining.
Two cottages – and homestead formerly a farm house.
28 closes of arable and pasture land.
The above with the said farm houses and homesteads said to contain 340 acres are situate in the parish of Newton Bromswold.
3 closes of arable land – adjoining the above on the north western side thereof containing 25 acres in the Borough of Higham Ferrers.
A close of arable land adjoining the above mentioned Newton Bromswold property on the western side thereof – with a cottage and homestead – said to contain 31 acres.
The whole in the occupation of Mr. James Harris – and we are informed there is no outgoing other than land tax.
We consider that the present saleable value of the whole is six thousand and that it is a good and sufficient security for trustees to advance thereon by way of loan the sum of four thousand pounds.

The letter lists the newly built farmhouse which is the farmhouse in use today. There is not only the old farm house and homestead adjoining, but also two cottages – and homestead formerly a farm house. Mr. Sartoris abandoned the farmhouses, which must have been in a state of disrepair. Was one of these old homesteads the mansion house mentioned in other deeds, which existed when Jacob Hunt became the landlord and when the Lambe family owned the manor? It would seem very likely, as in the conveyance in 1856 when Joseph Hunt sold the farm to Mr. Sartoris it was described as Manor and estate.

Further clues came from the West family themselves. When they moved to Newton Bromswold in 1935 an old stone farmhouse was in ruins in the orchard behind the present house. Mr. Clarke their landlord was selling off the stone from it. My two eldest sisters also remember playing around the ruin which was gradually becoming covered with weeds. They remember finding old coins and pieces of china there too. The cowshed my father had built during the 1950s was built near to the site.

An undated map amongst the farm deeds must have been drawn up before the present farmhouse was built, that is, somewhere between 1856 and 1893. It shows no buildings near to Newton Road, only one large one quite near 'the moat'. Was this the mansion house which was still standing when Pendered's carried out the valuation for F. U. Sartoris? Other tantalising clues, one being in the form of a blue tiled floor in the farmyard near to Jacob Hunt's barn, await further investigation.

Acknowledgement
I am grateful to the staff of Northamptonshire Record Office for their help. The 1801 plan, S(R) 3, is reproduced with permission from the Sartoris (Rushden) archive deposited in Northamptonshire Record Office.

And whereas the said several Lands and Grounds
lie intermixed, and for the Most part inconve-
niently situate, and in their present State capable
of but little Improvement, and it would be
advantageous to the several Proprietors to have
the same divided and inclosed, but such Division
and Inclosure cannot be effected without the Aid
of Parliament.

These words taken from the preamble to the
Moulton (Northamptonshire) Inclosure1 Act
contain the important implication of a con-
nection between inclosure and the need for
agricultural improvement. Although such
phrases had become stylised by the time of
the Moulton Act in 1772, originally, there
had doubtless been a more substantive reason
for introducing the notion of improvement as
an argument for the inclosure of the open
fields and wastes. Such passages and phrases
were considered important enough to be
included in parliamentary Bills and Acts (and
also in some non-parliamentary inclosure
agreements). Few writers today claim that
that this was the only reason for introducing
inclosure projects nor in fact was inclosure
the sole means whereby the agricultural
improvements of the 18th and 19th centuries
became possible. G. E. Mingay2, for example,
took the view that inclosure did not carry the
economic advantages that had formerly been
attributed to it and other writers have adopt-
ed more optimistic views of the open fields as
efficient agricultural units. D. McCloskey
drew attention to the open-field system as a
means whereby individual operators enjoyed
a fair and equal distribution of good and bad
land across the manor. This insured them
against extreme losses in bad years.3 E.

Kerridge, also writing in defence of the
open-field system, claimed that the individual
farmer enjoyed considerable freedom in his
choice of crops within the confines of his
own strips.4 J.V. Beckett, in particular, refutes
any notion of a dramatic improvement in
agricultural techniques after inclosure. As he
points out, immediately following the demise
of the open fields, the principal operators
were the same people as before and who had
the same outlook. It would have been sur-
prising therefore if agricultural methods on
most of the holdings underwent a sudden
programme of innovation.5 After investigat-
ing inclosure in England and Wales, M. E.
Turner concludes, 'the inefficiency of the
open fields is by no means as plain and obvi-
ous as it once seemed.6

Why then did the inclosers of the 18th
and 19th centuries imply that the open fields
were barriers to agricultural improvement?
The argument was re-examined in the 1980s
by Turner who once more highlighted inclo-
sure as an important factor in the adoption of
new agricultural techniques.7 Accepting that
inclosure alone had not brought about a rapid
revolution in agricultural methods, Turner
believed, nonetheless, that it could allow agri-
culture to become more efficient. Certainly
many of the new techniques developed during
the 18th century were better suited to
inclosed land than open-field farming.

The argument under examination is that
which maintains that, after an inclosure had
taken place, it may have become possible to
increase grain yields which, accompanied by
the cultivation of former wastes, could have
resulted in marked increases in total grain

1. Moulton Inclosure Act (1772), Northamptonshire
   Inclosure Acts, Northampton County Library, Local
   Studies.
2. Mingay, G. E., English landed society in the 18th cen-
   tury (1963).
   Common Fields’ in Parker, W. N. and Jones, E. L. (eds),
   European Peasants and their Markets: Essays in Agrarian
   History (1975), p.5.
   pp.94-5.
6. Turner, M., Enclosures in Britain: 1750-1830
7. Turner, M. E., 'English Open Fields and
   Enclosures: Retardation or Productivity Improve-
However, in practice, some of the arable land was instead turned over to pasture for cattle and sheep. Along with this shift to animal husbandry, other land was also taken out of cereal production and used instead for the production of fodder crops such as turnips. The agricultural improvement thus achieved was not, therefore, necessarily an increase in the total grain output but the diversification into sheep, beef or dairy which the higher grain yields and increased areas of cultivation permitted. It was this aspect of agricultural improvement before and after inclosure that Turner investigated, using as his main data source the information contained in the Home Office grain surveys of the late 18th and early 19th centuries – in particular, the one taken in 1801.

It is now possible to re-examine the possible phenomenon of an expansion in livestock production as an indicator of agricultural improvement following inclosure and perhaps, in so doing, point to a short-coming in Turner’s approach. The hypothesis is tested first though, by outlining the state of development of animal husbandry in Northamptonshire during the period c.1700-1850 using anecdotal evidence from a number of contemporary writers and then by resorting to some of the official data generated at the time.

Animal Husbandry at the end of the 18th century
Evidence from contemporary writers suggests that despite early innovations in the production of green fodder crops, the development of stock breeds in Northamptonshire was very slow and it was not until the 19th century – well after the period of peak inclosure activity, that any real advances were made. The main barriers to innovation seem to have been the local practice of buying in young stock and fattening it for the southern markets. Because there was no established tradition of breeding in the county, there was consequently very little interest in the development of new breeds. In this, Northamptonshire may have been backward because of its geographical location at the heart of England. Sitting astride a number of important drovers’ routes such as Welch Way and the Banbury Lane, the county and its farmers were destined to be no more than middlemen rather than either producers or consumers. James Donaldson, writing for the Board of Agriculture in 1794, recorded a lack of improvement in Northamptonshire breeds of sheep which contrasted with neighbouring counties. As he put it, ‘On the first view, it will appear surprising, that in this district, where so great a proportion of the lands are in a state of pasturage, little or no attention has been paid, till of late, to the improvement of the different kinds of flock . . .’

If such early writers implied a latent interest in animal husbandry amongst 18th-century Northamptonshire farmers, they also suggest

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that the production of fodder crops was well established prior to the advent of parliamentary inclosure. As early as the late 17th century, the Rev. John Morton observed that Northamptonshire was ‘in no wise inferior to its neighbours’ in introducing rye-grass and legume fodder crops. Later writers report on the cultivation of fodder crops such as Sainfoin, lucerne, clover and yellow hop trefoil which were being grown by the late 18th century and also vetch (tares) which was being produced by at least the early 19th century. Italian rye and clover were particularly recommended by Clarke Hillyard in the 1830s and 1840s, particularly when grown inter-mixed. The idea of mixed fodder crops was further developed by William Bearn, writing in the middle part of the 19th century. Put together, the evidence from these writers suggest that before inclosure by Act of Parliament, which first peaked in 1778, there was an interest in green fodder production, but that during the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, there were further developments with first, new crops appearing and then, innovative methods of growing them.

Arable farming in the first half of the 19th century

Having briefly considered the contemporary evidence of the development of livestock farming in Northamptonshire, what was the state of arable farming by 1800? By this time, the peak of inclosing activity had passed but many open-field villages still remained? As Turner has pointed out, the open fields were not so inefficient as once thought, but for the otherwise improving farmer, they did have a number of retarding features.16 Although a wide range of crops was grown in the open fields, farmers were denied complete freedom in their choices and they were often prevented from deciding between arable and animal husbandry.

There is a lack of comprehensive statistical evidence of the state of Northamptonshire agriculture in the last decade of the 18th century but the general climate was one of economic difficulties. From 1793 until 1815, Britain was embroiled in an expensive series of wars with France. To compound the food shortages caused by the wars, a number of poor harvests resulted in wheat steadily rising in price from £2.61 per quarter in 1794 to £6.00 per quarter in 1801.17

The Home Office responded to the food shortages by conducting a number of grain surveys. Of these surveys, the one carried out in 1801 was the most comprehensive and is now the most statistically reliable source of information on the state of agriculture.18 Turner examined the Northamptonshire crop returns and working with a sample of 147 parishes, he found that those which were already inclosed (102) had 23% of their area as arable land. This compared with the other 45 parishes which were still open field and which retained 30% of their land as arable.19

Turner’s study took no account of the precise nature and scale of the so-called open and inclosed parishes. Many of the recently inclosed parishes used in the sample must have already contained substantial ancient inclosures. For example, 2,305 acres were inclosed at Weldon in 1794. The 1831 census, 37 years later, gives a parish total area of 3,680 acres – a difference of 37.3%. Other examples include Aynho in the west of the county which was inclosed in 1793 and had a difference of 36.4% between the award area and the 1831 total. Wadenhoe, in east Northamptonshire, and inclosed in 1795, had a difference of 38% between the area inclosed and the 1831 total. Such parishes could not then, be accurately described as ‘recently inclosed’. Aynho had been the subject of two early inclosures in 1561 and 162020 and likewise, Wadenhoe in 1630.21

Similarly, how ‘open’ were Turner’s open-field villages? Of those parishes which were

\begin{table}[h!]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|c|}
\hline
Village & Year of & \% of 1831 area already inclosed \\
& Parl. Inc. & \\
\hline
Crick & 1777 & 20.0 \\
Duston & 1777 & 20.7 \\
Holcot & 1778 & 21.5 \\
Desborough & 1777 & 25.5 \\
Aldwincle & 1772 & 25.6 \\
Harrington & 1775 & 28.7 \\
Kilsby & 1778 & 31.0 \\
Lowick & 1771 & 32.3 \\
Bulwick & 1779 & 33.4 \\
Duddington & 1775 & 33.6 \\
Tansor & 1779 & 34.5 \\
Great Billing & 1778 & 35.2 \\
Titchmarsh & 1779 & 39.2 \\
Yarley Hastings & 1777 & 40.9 \\
Scaldwell & 1775 & 43.7 \\
Welford & 1778 & 49.7 \\
Braybrooke & 1779 & 53.3 \\
East Haddon & 1773 & 56.9 \\
Maidford & 1779 & 66.5 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Nineteen Villages with substantial areas of old inclosure, but further inclosed by Parliament in the 1770s.}
\label{tab:inclosed}
\end{table}

18. HO 67, Parish Acreage Returns, (1801), PRO.
Based at Harlestone at the time of this advertisement, Cooch's seed dressers or winnowing machines became popular on larger arable farms throughout the region. The winnowing machine, as they were more popularly known, was used to process the corn that was being kept for use as seed for the following year's crop. The giant hand-operated fan at the back blew the chaff away and vibrating screens then separated the corn from the smaller seeds which had grown as weeds in the previous crop. From an advertisement in Northamptonshire Agricultural Society's Annual Show catalogue July, 1862 (reproduced by permission of Northamptonshire Libraries and Information Service).
Table 2 Summary of Northamptonshire arable farming, 1801.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade of Inclosure</th>
<th>Percentage area of land supporting principal crops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1760s</td>
<td>28.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1770s</td>
<td>28.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1780s</td>
<td>27.9</td>
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<td>1790s</td>
<td>29.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1800s</td>
<td>30.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1810s</td>
<td>32.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1820s</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Northamptonshire Inclosure Award Enrolments, NRO; 1831 Census NRO; 1801 Crop Returns PRO 67, PRO.

still open field in 1801 but inclosed by Act of Parliament in that year or later, 11 out of 25 of them have differences between award areas and 1831 areas of 30% or more. Of the 25, 14 display acreage differences of 20% or more. In other words, in 1801, they were not completely open field at all but as a group, contained large areas of inclosed land. Table 1 is based on 19 Northamptonshire villages which were inclosed by Parliament in the 1770s but display a difference of 20% or more between the area given in the award and the area supplied by the 1831 Census. This implies that the 19 villages already had substantial areas of old inclosed land of between a fifth and two thirds of their total acreage.

With Turner’s 1980s studies in mind, an alternative list of 84 Northamptonshire parishes has been drawn up on the basis that they conform to a number of criteria which include; their appearance in the crop returns; their known date of inclosure by Act of Parliament; and the area of the parish known to have been subject to inclosure (as it appears in the award). Since total parish areas are not given in the crop returns, only those which appeared in the 1831 Census have been included.

Decadal totals and the mean average percentage of the 1831 area being put down to arable have been calculated and these show that, in 1801, there were differences in the patterns of farming between those parishes which had already been inclosed by parliament and those which had not. Of the parishes that had already been inclosed, those that had been inclosed the longest devoted the highest proportion of their total area to arable farming – just over a quarter. Consequently and vice-versa, they must have committed proportionately less to grassland and animal husbandry. Those parishes more recently inclosed – within the previous 20 years – devoted a smaller proportion of their available area to arable and so presumably expanded livestock herds and flocks.

Of the parishes that were still to be inclosed by Parliament in 1801, the picture was generally one of much larger areas of arable land, as much in some isolated cases as 40%-50% of the total land area recorded in 1831. With the exception of the parishes that were to be inclosed in the 1820s, all the decades for the post 1800 period recorded average proportions of approximately 28%.

The crop returns allow us to summarise the patterns of Northamptonshire arable farming in 1801. Table 2 is based on data from the 84 parishes. It shows that there was more than twice the proportion of land supporting turnip/rape crops in the inclosed parishes than in the open-fields parishes. Oats too were more popular in the already-inclosed villages (all of which crops were used primarily as animal fodder). Conversely, the open-field villages grew approximately twice the amount of peas and beans than their inclosed neighbours.

There are some problems interpreting the data on turnips since they were included in the returns with rape, but turnips had been
grown in the county since at least the 17th century. By the late 18th century, Donaldson had found them being grown in considerable quantities on every arable farm. Many were eaten by sheep or lambs, which, in the area of Northampton, were slaughtered for local consumption. (elsewhere in the county they were sold on towards the London markets). Oil-seed rape (cole-seed) was grown for three different purposes. It could be grown for the oil-bearing seeds, in which case it was allowed to grow to maturity before being mowed and dried, or as a green fodder crop in which case it could be intermixed with other brassicas such as turnips, or lastly, it could be used as a green manure crop. The growing of large areas of rape then, is significant as it may too have accompanied an expansion in animal husbandry.

Because of the higher proportion of oats and turnips being grown in the inclosed villages, Turner conjectured that this could be an indication of a change of emphasis towards animal husbandry but questioned whether the evidence is strong enough to support the contention. When Donaldson reported on the county in 1794, he claimed that only a small quantity of oats compared to other grains was being grown – not enough to provide cattle feed. Beans were used as a substitute but, 13 years later, William Pitt, also writing for the Board of Agriculture, was at variance with this and reported that 24,000 acres of oats were producing 30,000 tons of grain per annum. This was a net county surplus and exports were made to neighbouring counties. To complicate the arithmetic still further, Pitt claimed that 11,000 tons of barley was also being produced annually for animal feed. It is difficult to arrive at firm conclusions, the apparent change from pulses to oats could reflect no more than a change in diet for the draught horses but it does seem that by the early 19th century, substantial quantities of grain were being produced for animal feed.

By using the information provided by the crop returns, differences in the agricultural patterns of open and inclosed parishes are evident. The open-field villages cultivated the highest proportion of their land – in some cases, almost as much as a half. Amongst the inclosed parishes, those which had been inclosed the longest, devoted the highest proportion of their land to arable. Those more recently inclosed appeared to use the highest proportion of available land for animal husbandry. Of the arable crops, whereas the open-field villages grew large areas of pulses, the inclosed parishes also produced the highest proportions of turnips or oilseed rape and also of oats – all fodder crops suggesting that the inclosed parishes had a higher proportion of animals to feed.

Conclusions
Before drawing conclusions from these results, the validity of the crop returns as a source has to be considered. The main problem lies in the way that the original data was collected. Responsibility for this was delegated by the then Home Secretary to the Anglican dioceses and from them, to the parish incumbents. Many of this latter group were titheholders and when they tried to question the farmers about their crops, some were met with understandable suspicion and sometimes even, outright hostility. The reporters for Boughton, Brigstock, Byfield, Long Buckby, Middleton Cheney and Watford all recorded in their analysis that they believed the totals supplied to them to be under-estimates. At Collyweston, Farthingstone and Hemington, the farmers refused point blank to co-operate and would have nothing to do with the incumbents’ questions. The indignant reporter for Staverton noted that the task of collecting the required data ought not to be carried out by the titheholder. ‘Besides’ he went on, ‘the clergy need not be degraded by such employment at a time when every ill-disposed person can open a conventicle for schism and sedition at the easy price of sixpence’!

None the less, in the absence of more reliable data, the crop returns remain the best sources of information that we have for the period. They indicate that there were some
differences in the patterns of farming in open and inclosed villages. Those parishes which had been inclosed the longest, devoted the greatest proportion of their land to arable farming while the more recently inclosed tended to emphasise grass and livestock farming. These differences were slight though when compared to the villages which were still open-field in 1801 where as much as half the total available farm land was devoted to arable crops (these arable crops were not exclusively cereals but included seed and fodder crops which were not inconsistent with the keeping of larger herds).

The open field villages in 1801 were growing nearly twice the quantity of pulse crops compared to the inclosed villages. Conversely, the inclosed villages supported approximately twice the proportion of turnips and oil-seed rape than the open-field parishes. There was also a higher production of oats on the inclosed farms and the versatility of crops such as oil-seed rape has been emphasised—particularly their importance as animal feed. However, this evidence of an apparent increase in the production of fodder crops conflicts with the views of the contemporary writers who implied that the breeding and rearing of cattle in Northamptonshire remained under-developed until later in the 19th century. It would not be inconsistent though if there was an increase in the demand for fodder to fatten cattle en route to London.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the available evidence then. First, improvements were being made in Northamptonshire agriculture during the 18th and early 19th centuries. As to the nature of these improvements, it has been shown that there are indications of a shift in the agricultural balance towards stock fattening. Secondly however, inclosure may not have been the only agent necessary for these changes—most of the key elements were already in place by the early 18th century—but inclosure would have made the often subtle transition easier.

There was a cycle of improvement which dated from at least the late 17th century and lasted till at least well into the 19th. It saw improved yields, greater arable diversification and a steady growth in animal husbandry. As Turner claimed in the 1980s, inclosure was not necessarily an automatic door to these changes but it was, none the less, a door and one which opened frequently and with profit.28 Whilst Turner may have over-emphasised the role of inclosure in the process of agricultural improvement, the evidence suggests that the improvement that did occur, would not have been either so profound or so immediate without the accompaniment of farming in severalty which was permitted by inclosure.

The Prodigal Rector of Blisworth

GEORGE FREESTON and BARBARA HORNBY

This article about Blisworth includes the reigns of three Georges: George III, George IV and George Freeston. The first two probably did not know of Blisworth’s existence; for the third, there was hardly anything about the history of Blisworth that he did not know. So this article is a ‘thank you’ to George for the remarkable collection of information about Blisworth that he gathered over the years. There are many books and articles to be written based on George’s archives. This is just a start, a taster as it were, to whet your appetite for more.

Come then to Blisworth. It is 1762 and George III has been on the throne for two years. The Reverend Nathaniel Trotter has been inducted as the new Rector of Blisworth on 14th December. His patron was Charles Henry, Lord Hatton.

Blisworth’s 12th-century church, dedicated to St John the Baptist, is on rising land which was on the south-east side of the bridge which carried the Blisworth to Towcester road over a brook. The ancient rectory, a typical Northamptonshire long house, stood on the rise of ground northwest of the church tower.

Mr. Trotter seems to have had a peaceful time for his first 18 years in the parish but this was to change in 1780 when the first Baptist meeting was organised by John Goodridge. He came to Blisworth with his new bride and became a tenant of the Duke of Grafton. Mr. Goodridge was to become a severe trial to Mr. Trotter.

The Rector was also soon to learn that a canal company had been formed to build a wide canal from Braunston to London, named the Grand Junction Canal. It was planned to pass through the lower part of Blisworth parish, following much the same route as the brook, thus passing within 100 yards of Mr. Trotter’s rectory. Work on the canal began in September 1793. From the minutes of the company we learn that 5,000 ‘navvies’ congregated in Blisworth. The Rector recorded births and deaths of the ‘navvies’ and their children in the registers, sometimes indicating the location of the birth as a field.

In February 1797 Mr. Trotter died and was buried at Newbold, Leicestershire. His place was soon filled by the Reverend John Ambrose, MA, who was inducted on 19th April 1797. His patron was George Finch-Hatton. The Reverend Ambrose was to become notorious and mysterious.

We learn in Alumni Oxoniensis that [John] Ambrose, son of John of London, gent., matriculated at University College, Oxford, in 1784, aged 16, but did not obtain his BA and MA until 1791. Seven years seems a long time – one wonders what he was up to. In France, perhaps, where he was to end up later in his life. In Alumni Oxoniensis as well as in Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy (where he has a very brief entry), his name is spelt ‘Ambrosse’ in the French style.

In the collection of Blisworth presentations it is stated that John Ambrose MA of University College, Oxford, was ordained priest by the Lord Bishop of London at the Chapel Royal, St James’s in 1792. Prior to coming to Blisworth, Ambrose had been at Poulten, Wiltshire (now Gloucestershire). John Ambrose appears to have been attending to his duties in Blisworth in the first years of his incumbency, signing the registers regularly. However, in a notice about the sale of tithes in Blisworth, the clergyman named at Blisworth is the ‘Rev. Gillespie’ – a curate, perhaps.

At the March 1807 visitation by the Archdeacon, Ambrose signed the registers with a flourish. In 1810 the registers are again inspected by the Archdeacon, but this time...
the entries are signed by Joseph Sturges, another curate. There must have been a dispute over this signing because Sturges’ name is crossed out and above it is signed Maria Ambrose. The mystery begins—was she Ambrose’s wife or sister and why was she signing the registers? In 1812, the Archdeacon visited again and this time Sturges signed the registers.

Soon after this Sturges left Blisworth and his post was taken by another curate, the Rev. William Butlin. It now seems obvious that Ambrose had absented himself from the village, for at the 1811 assessment of the Ambrose’s rates for £5 12s 3d., the cash was not forthcoming and neither was he. Also at this same time a sequestrator was appointed to handle the affairs of the church in the Rector’s absence. A search through the registers shows that Ambrose’s signature disappears from 1807, entries now being signed by the faithful curate Butlin.

In one of his many searches through books and papers, George found a reference to Ambrose in The Pytchley Hunt: Past and Present⁴ which indicated that he was very fond of gambling, in this instance on boxing matches. Lord Althorp was involved, as was Lord Byron. In the chapter on ‘Lord Althorp, a Patron of Boxing’ the author says:

“We read in the life of Lord Althorp by Sir Denis Le Marchant that when the party come together to witness the affair had assembled over night at the ‘George Hotel’, it was found that the beds were not sufficient in number; so they tossed up, and the winners turned in first. At a certain hour these were called, and the losers took their places. Among the company was the Rector of Blisworth, ‘Parson Ambrose’, a man too well known in sporting-circles. He disgraced a profession he might have adorned, as he was clever and had a remarkably fine delivery. Macklin, the actor, left him fifty pounds, to preach his funeral sermon. Obliged at last to fly from his creditors, he died abroad in misery and want.

Turning to Le Marchant in his Memoir of Earl Spencer⁵ we read:

He [Lord Althorp] described the fight between Guilly and the Chicken. How he rode down to Brickhill, – how he was loitering

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about the inn door, when a barouche-and-four drove up with Lord Byron and a party, and Jackson the trainer, — how they all dined together, and how pleasant it had been. Then the fight the next day: the men stripping, the intense excitement, the sparring; then the first round, the attitude of the men — it was really worthy of Homer.

In a footnote to this, Le Marchant says that ‘the following addition to this anecdote I owe to an old friend of Lord Althorp’s’. To the piece quoted in The Pytchley Hunt, he adds: ‘He [Ambrose] passed as the natural son of an Irish Peer, whose loose morals had descended to him.’ What of John Ambrose of London, gent.? Le Marchant repeats the belief that Ambrose died abroad, this time in ‘obscurity and want’. But did he?

In an attempt to date this event, I consulted A Pictorial History of Boxing and Bareknuckles: A Social History of Prize-Fighting. Dennis Brailsford, the author of the latter, responded to my query regarding the fight between Gully and ‘the Chicken’, real name Henry Pearce, known as ‘Hen’ hence ‘the Game Chicken’. Without going into too much detail about prize fighting in the 18th century, let us just say that he thinks the fight in question was probably between Gully and Gregson, the Lancashire Giant, not the Chicken, on 8th May 1808. To quote Mr. Brailsford:

[The fight] was expected to take place at Ashley Common on the Buckingham/Beds. border and enormous crowds had gathered at Woburn and other places the day before, filling the inns to bursting point. Interference by magistrates meant that it eventually took place at Sir John Sebright’s park in Hertfordshire. The Game Chicken was there, but as a spectator, and others included Jackson and Lord Byron.

George and I made a ‘field trip’ to Bedford in search of an inn called The George at Brickhill. We found a suburb of Bedford town which was called Brickhill but no George Inn. However, the Buckinghamshire County Archivist responded to a query with the information that there had been a George in Little Brickhill licensed from 1805 to 1810 to William Ratcliffe. So if Ambrose had been at the fight in 1808 and then gone abroad, this could tie up with the last signature having been in 1807. He must have been around sometime in 1808 because George also had evidence that in that year Ambrose paid for two subscriptions for the militia for R. Campion and R. Rogers to the tune of £64 2s 6d.

The story surrounding this would have been memorable enough but George then found that Ambrose had in fact returned and taken up his post as Rector. In the 15th year of George IV’s reign, on 25th December 1835, William Butlin, Curate, signed the baptismal register for Adelaide, daughter of William and Elizabeth Lambert. On 10th January 1836, John Ambrose, Rector, signed the baptismal register for Ann Elizabeth, daughter of Charles and Mary Dent.

Even more amazingly, he did not return alone but was accompanied by a wife and two daughters. In the baptismal register for 1837, we read the following:

Entry 613. March 26th, Juliana, daughter of Rev. John Ambrose and Juliana, his wife. NB This child was born at Nantes in France January 23nd 1825, there being neither Protestant Place of Worship or Protestant Clergyman.

Entry 614. March 26th, Emma, daughter of Rev. John Ambrose and Juliana, his wife. NB This child was born at Nantes in France July 18 1833, there being …

Both girls were baptised in Blisworth by their father. Young Juliana did not live long to enjoy her new home in England for she died at Stony Stratford later in 1837, aged 12 years, and was buried at Blisworth on 24th December 1837.

8. Buckinghamshire Record Office register of licensed victuallers (Q/RLV 7).
Intrigued by this family acquired in France, I consulted the authorities in Nantes through a French friend and was able to get copies of the birth registrations for Juliana and Emma. Between 1826 and 1833, the details required on the registrations had obviously changed to be more complete so I give here the one for Emma, born in 1833:

In the year 1833, the 19th of July at 10 o’clock in the morning before us the undersigned, civil status officer and deputy officer, delegated by the Mayor of Nantes, ‘chevalier de la legion d’honneur’, has appeared Mr Jean Ambrose, owner, aged 62, living at the ‘Moulin des Poules’, 6th district, who presented a female child, born yesterday at 9 o’clock in the morning, of him and of Mrs Julianne Colipar, his wife, aged 27, who names this child Emma.

It is intriguing that Ambrose described himself as ‘owner,’ not clergyman. No record could be found in Nantes of the marriage between Ambrose and Juliana Colipar. The age difference between Ambrose and his wife is striking. What is more striking is that he obviously fathered another child after his return to England because we find this entry in the baptismal register, ‘Entry 618. June 11th 1837, Julia, daughter of The Revd John and Julia Ambrose,’ signed by Ambrose. Note that his wife’s name has now become Julia rather than Juliana.

The last of Ambrose’s signatures appears in the burial register on 15th March 1839 when he conducts the funeral of a village child of one month old. In June 1839, the prodigal Rector, aged 71 years, was buried by a new curate, the Rev. E. R. Butcher. We can only wonder what became of his young wife and surviving daughters.

In a letter dated 22nd September 1845 from the Duke of Grafton regarding the school,9 he says; ‘This deed is for future times as well as the present and who knows but another Parson Ambrose may spring up again?’

Finally, is there any connection between our Parson Ambrose and Joseph Ambrose Lawson, Esq., whose white marble memorial tablet is in Blisworth Church? Joseph Lawson was Irish.

A ‘Sad, Sad Narrative’: The Death of Digby Dolben

TREVOR HOLD

Introduction
The poetry of Digby Mackworth Dolben (1848-67) is not widely known today, except to a few aficionados. Yet less than a century ago it was extensively acclaimed, quoted and anthologised. The Poet Laureate, Robert Bridges, believed that the later poems compared with ‘anything that was ever written by any English poet at his age’ (1915: xcvi) and edited the Collected Poems which Oxford University Press included in its prestigious Standard Poets series. Both Henry James and W. H. Hudson were admirers and his poetry was set to music by Gustav Holst and Edmund Rubbra. Today, however, interest in Dolben centres not so much on his poetry, as on his importance in the emotional life of another, greater poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89). Even so, his own poetry is by no means negligible, as a perusal of Martin Cohen’s The Poems and Letters of Digby Mackworth Dolben (1981) demonstrates. And his life, brief as it was, reveals one of the most interesting figures to have emerged from the Oxford Movement. It shows a sensitive youth caught up in the religious turmoil of his time, trying to come to terms with conflicting ideals and dreams, whose career came to an untimely end when he was drowned in the River Welland on 28th June 1867. It is his death and its aftermath on which I shall concentrate in this article. There has hitherto been confusion about the where and the how of his drowning; most accounts are inaccurate, and the following pages aim to present the facts and clarify the situation. Before that, however, some biographical background is necessary.

Digby Augustus Stewart Mackworth Dolben, the third son and youngest child of William Mackworth Dolben (1806-72) and his wife Frances (1817-92), was born on Guernsey on 8th February 1848 and brought up at the family home of Finedon Hall, Northamptonshire. He was educated at a prep. school in Cheam, then at Eton. Here he was a contemporary of Robert Bridges (1844-1930), who was a distant cousin, and it was Bridges who was later to introduce him to Gerard Manley Hopkins. Other Eton friends included Alfred Wyatt-Edgell (later 5th Lord Bray), Victor Stuckey Coles (later Principal of Pusey House, Oxford) and Martin Le Grand Gosselin, ‘Marchie’, for whom Dolben seems to have formed an adolescent crush. It was at Eton that he began writing poetry and between 1864 and 1867 he produced more than 80 poems. Even at Cheam he was exhibiting a strong ascetic and religious bent, and at Eton he began to show strong leanings towards Roman Catholicism, making surreptitious visits to High Anglican and Roman

Figure 1: Digby Mackworth Dolben aged 16
(from a photograph taken just before he left Eton (1864) by Messrs. Hills and Saunders)
Catholic establishments near the school. At Easter 1864, he joined the High Anglican religious Order of St Benedict, founded by Reverend Joseph Leycester Lyne ('Father Ignatius'; 1837–1908), and began signing himself as 'Brother Dominic' (he also talked of converting Finedon Hall into a monastery!). All this hardly endeared him to the Eton authorities and caused his parents—stoutly Anglican in their religion—much anxiety. Eventually, at the end of 1864, he was withdrawn from the school and sent instead to a succession of private tutors, to prepare him for the Oxford scholarship examinations. He stayed first with Reverend Constantine Prichard at South Luffenham in Rutland (Easter-Summer 1865); then, after Prichard fell ill, with Reverend Tweed at Coleby in Lincolnshire (Autumn 1865 to Spring 1866) and Reverend Henry De Winton at Boughrood in Radnorshire (Easter 1866–May 1867) before finally returning to Prichard. By now he had decided to become a Roman Catholic but to placate his parents had agreed to defer the move. He arrived at South Luffenham on 15th June 1867, to spend the summer with Prichard studying Greek and Latin before taking the Christ Church entrance examination the following autumn. Less than a fortnight later, he was dead.

Prichard’s memorandum

In the Dolben family archive at Northamptonshire County Record Office is a leather-bound notebook (NRO/D(F)7). It has been written in from both ends and contains, from the front, Greek and Latin translations and prose in Digby Dolben’s hand, all but the last corrected in blue or red crayon pencil by his tutors (De Winton and Prichard). At the other end of the book is a single diary entry, dated ‘Boughrood 13 Sept. 1866’, again in Dolben’s hand, describing a visit to Hereford Cathedral on his way back to Boughrood (Figure 2), followed by a long narrative in another hand. This is Constantine Prichard’s account—the ‘sad, sad narrative’—of Dolben’s stay at South Luffenham in June 1867. It is in two distinct sections: June 15th–27th, the days before the death, and June 28th, the day of the drowning. Passages from it have been published before. Bridges quotes a portion in his Memoir (1915: cviii–cx): less than half, and all from the first section; the section dealing with Dolben’s death is briefly paraphrased. He reorders one of the sections: his final paragraph is in fact taken from earlier in the narrative. Paddy Kitchen (1989: 99–102) quotes more extensively, including much omitted by Bridges. What follows is a full transcription of the Memorandum. But first it is necessary to introduce the person who wrote it, a person whose importance in Dolben’s life deserves more than a footnote—Constantine Prichard.

Constantine Estlin Prichard (1820–69) came from a highly cultivated family background. He was born in Bristol in 1820, the third son of James Cowles Prichard (1780–1848) and his wife Anne Maria. His father was an eminent physician, an authority on mental diseases and disorders—he was...
appointed a Commissioner for Lunacy in 1845—and on ethnology, for which he was appointed FRS. His publications included *Treatise on Insanity and other Disorders affecting the Mind* (1835), for long the standard work on the subject, and *Natural History of Man* (1843), which sustained the opinion that the races of mankind are varieties of the same species. His mother was the daughter of John Prior Estlin (1747-1817), a Unitarian minister in Bristol, who was a friend of Coleridge and Southey. Of his brothers, the second, Augustin (1818-98), followed his father into medicine, becoming a leading surgeon in the Bristol area, whilst the other two, James Cowles junior (1816-48) and Theodore Joseph (1821-46) entered the church.

Amongst Constantine’s early friends were the economist and constitutional historian Walter Bagehot (1826-77), to whom he was distantly related and who mentions Constantine in several letters, and the poet Arthur Hugh Clough (1819-61), who he met at Balliol College, Oxford. At Balliol he was a Scholar (1837-42) and a Fellow (1842-54) and Catechetical Lecturer.

He was admitted to holy orders as a deacon in 1846 and in the following year was appointed Vice-Principal of Wells Theological College; in 1852 he was appointed Prebendary and Assistant Curate of Wells Cathedral. On 17th June 1854 he was installed as Rector of South Luffenham in Rutland, a living in the patronage of Balliol College, and a month later, on 20th July 1854, he married Mary Alice Seymour at Westcott parish church in Surrey. Alice, 13 years younger than Constantine, bore him five children, all of whom were baptised at South Luffenham: Mabel Alice (b.1855), Walter Henry (b.1856), Constance Mary (b.1858), Frances Edith (‘Edy’, b.1859) and Leonora Seymour (b.1861). Prichard was highly regarded both as a classical scholar and theologian by his contemporaries and was the author of several books, including *Sermons on the Lord’s Prayer intended chiefly for Village Congregations* (1856), *Thoughts on Free Inquiry, Evidences and Subscription* (1864) and (posthumously with E R Bernard) *Selected Letters of Cicero* (1872) and *Selected Letters of Pliny* (1872). He died in 1869.

Why did Prichard write his Memorandum? When? And for whom? Bridges refers to it as ‘the little memoir of his last days that Mr Prichard wrote at the time, and sent to the family at Finedon.’ It could not have been completed straight away (i.e. before 6th July) for he mentions the ‘nervous illness’ from which Walter subsequently suffered and also Dolben’s burial, which took place on 6th July; but it was almost certainly written not long after 6th July. Why it was written and for whom are less clear. It was sent to Dolben’s parents ‘tucked in’, as it were, to one of Digby’s returned possessions, his schoolbook of translations. Its outward purpose seems to have been to acquaint them with the facts of the drowning tragedy and by doing so to give them consolation. But there seems to be more to it than that.

Whatever his overt intention, Prichard was also trying to explain the events to himself and clarify his thoughts and feelings — indeed, to assuage his own feelings of guilt. In the first part of the narrative, he emphasises Digby’s ideas and thoughts through their conversations together, as well as the academic work he was undertaking. When it comes to the question of Digby’s Catholic leanings, delicate ground to traverse as far as the intended readers of the Memorandum were concerned, he treads warily. He emphasises Digby’s virtues — his tenderness and kindness to the rectory children, his consideration for Alice, his liveliness and attention when religious topics were under discussion. In his account of the drowning itself, he goes out of his way to show that all possible attempts were made to restore Digby’s life, and to show that no-one else was to blame. He particularly wishes to exonerate his son, Walter.

Prichard himself emerges as an anxious, hypersensitive person, almost nanny-like in his care and concern. Not unexpectedly, he felt that he bore some blame for the accident (he reminds one of Hermann Melville’s Captain Vere trying to justify Billy Budd’s execution). But this was perhaps due to his own precarious health. From his references in the Memorandum, his inability to join in long walks or excursions, he was still semi-convalescent. At the same time, all the ‘terror, confusion and distress of the moment’ is
vividly conveyed; the narrative has an almost biblical intensity. Prichard himself is revealed as thoughtful and compassionate, a quiet, scholarly man who had great affection for and a high opinion of his remarkable charge. Dolben was no great scholar — his corrected Greek and Latin translations and proses show this — and, as we know, there lay beneath his quiet, dreamy exterior a volatile temperament — all the ‘arrogant impetuosity of youth’. As both Bridges and Hopkins realised, Constantine Prichard was the finest teacher and mentor that Digby Dolben could have had.

In the following transcription of the Memorandum, all abbreviations, including ampersands, have been filled out. I have also added footnotes to illuminate contemporary references and obscurities in the text.

**Constantine Prichard’s Memorandum**

Dear Digby Mackworth Dolben came to us on Saturday June 15 1867, it being intended that he should stay here during the summer and read preparatory to going to Oxford in October. We both had looked forward with the greatest pleasure to his return, having become so much attached to him when here two years ago. Once or twice we had seen him since, but only for a passing visit. We had sent the carriage for the train earlier in the day, but he had not come, and we had given up expecting him, when we heard a ring at 10 o’clock at night. He was received very gladly, and with a good deal of laughing, in which he joined — as we were accustomed to say that he generally missed his train and came at unexpected hours. He had grown a good deal, it seemed to me, since he was here — he was very pale, and to a stranger might have looked in ill health, but I did not think his appearance expressed this. A relative, who had seen him, but whom we had told of his character and poetical gifts, was much struck by his countenance and manner, which seemed to her expressive of what she had heard. I shall put down the (unfortunately) very few reminiscences that occur to me of his short sojourn with us, which, to look back on, is like a happy dream suddenly sorrowfully cut short.

I do not remember anything particular of the next day, which was Sunday. He was at Church twice with us: I was not strong enough to take more than a very small part in the morning service. His demeanour in Church was, as always, marked by great reverence — and he seemed to enter into the service, I fancied, more than he done two years ago. In the evening we walked to North Luffenham, I returning at about half way. With Alice, Mr Egerton and Miss Hughes he walked on. He talked chiefly to Alice. Their conversation was often about poetry — about his home — sometimes on religious matters.

On Monday we talked over his reading: he told me what he had been doing lately — his box of books was brought up and unpacked — and we found room in the drawingroom shelves for his books of poetry, etc. He began to read Ajax of Sophocles, and to write Latin. We dined at halfpast one and two — he generally read on until nearly that time — sitting in the same room with me, as his own room was not ready, owing to our relation being with us. If he had read enough, he used to construe to me before dinner: if not, in the afternoon. He seemed really to wish to lose no time, and to do thoroughly what he had to do. Before dinner I used sometimes to ask him to go into the garden for some air and exercise. Sometimes he would begin a game of croquet — or walk about and talk with Alice — or to the children. But he never used to waste his mornings, or go out before he had done as much as he meant to. One day little Edy, looking in at

1. Dolben’s previous stay at South Luffenham rectory had been in the spring and summer of 1865, See W. B. Gamlen’s recollections in Bridges, 1915, cxvi.
2. The nearest railway station was at South Luffenham itself, on the Midland branch line linking Rugby and Stamford, opened in 1850.
3. Prichard did not enjoy good health. In the summer of 1865 he suffered from pneumonia which meant that he was unable to take pupils for several months.
4. Alice: Prichard’s wife, Mary Alice (née Seymour, b.1833). She was the daughter of Henry Seymour, Esq., of Westcott, Surrey, and married Prichard on 20 July 1854, shortly after his appointment as Rector of South Luffenham.
5. Mr. Egerton: Prichard’s curate at South Luffenham. Charles Cadwallader Egerton was curate there, 1862-70, before his appointment as Rector of Weston Longville in Norfolk.
6. Miss Hughes: an unidentified visitor.
7. ‘Our relation’: Miss Wilkins, Prichard’s cousin (see later in narrative).
the window, asked him to come out. He said he could not—and then laughing said to Alice: ‘Mrs Prichard, I think Edy imagines I am in a state of perpetual punishment.’

Walter9 and Mabel10 used to come in, for a few minutes each, to say their Latin to me. I asked him if it disturbed him, and he said Oh! no—as if he liked it. And I could see that he was sometimes much amused by their questions and remarks. He was always gentle and kind with children; perhaps a little reserved towards them, but his manner at the same time expressed tenderness. Whilst reading, myself, in the same room, I used sometimes to talk with him, as I could always count on his being interested and on his quickness of apprehension. I was studying the book of Job; and on the last morning, if I remember right, talked to him of the meaning of the difficult passage in CXIX ‘I know that my Redeemer liveth’ which the commentator I was studying took as an expression of hope of the resurrection of the Body—(though the words ‘in my flesh I shall see God’ should probably be translated without my flesh). He stopped in his reading, as always, to listen with interest.

Indeed I have never known any one of his age—perhaps none at all—whom it was such a pleasure to converse with and to teach. On his own subject of poetry—and knowledge of art, his mind was far in advance of mine, far more even than I was then aware of, though I was aware of it—But on general topics, history, philosophy, classics and the like, I felt that he was interested in gaining ideas. His Latin writing was rather drudgery to him, though necessary—and he took much pains with it. I had advised him to read some of Cicero’s philosophical works, as interesting in themselves, and giving him a habit of thinking in Latin—and he seemed to like the idea, and had begun the De Finibus.11 I used to look forward to the pleasure of reading philosophy with him. His appreciation of classical poetry was very great. Sophocles was not I think, his favourite author, but he spoke of the great beauty of the descriptions in the Oedipus Coloneus. The last piece he construed to me was the speech of Ajax taking leave of the world before his death.12 On my asking him whether it was not beautiful, he said, ‘Very beautiful’, emphatically. I remarked that one could have been content if the play had ended

10. Mabel: the Prichards’ eldest daughter, Mabel Alice (bapt. 3/2/1856).
11. De Finibus Bounonum et Malorum (‘On the Chief Good and Evil’), written in 45BC.
there. He said ‘yes’: and then added with a smile
‘In the Persae (a play of Æschylus) which I read
with you when I was here before, there were
some hundreds of lines at the end, with little but
\( \alpha \), \( \alpha \) in them’ – alas! alas!

These were the last words I heard him say in
his lesson: I rather think the last I heard him speak.

Our life was very even and uneventful during
this fortnight. He seemed quite happy, much more
so than when here before, though then he was not
unhappy. But now there was a continual play of
mind, as if he was at peace, and had leisure for such
enjoyments as his studies and books and conversa-
tion gave him. He knew and felt that we all
loved him. His playfulness in conversation and
quiet perception of humour were great; and at
almost every meal, as well as afterwards in the
evening, there was much amusement between
him and others of our party. Occasionally there
was a grave argument or tone in conversation;
then he did not say very much, but listened
intently and with much interest, and occasionally
joined. At breakfast, one morning, we were talk-
ing of Dr Newman’s writings,\( ^\text{15} \) which Miss
Wilkins (my cousin) had, and said she would not
part with on any account. He said Dr N. had a
number of copies of the Tracts for the Times at
Birmingham,\( ^\text{14} \) in his library. I remembered that
these were of ephemeral interest, most of them,
and it had passed away in great measure,\( ^\text{11} \) to
which he assented – He always seemed to speak
of Dr Newman with much reverence. I said to
Miss W. in his presence that with all his genius he
was an unconvincing writer, especially in his use
of Scripture. Dear D. made no answer: but one
always felt sure of his intelligent apprehension
whether he agreed or not. On speaking of Dr
Pusey’s re-publication of No go,\( ^\text{12} \) which says that
the Articles admit of an interpretation consistent
with Roman Catholic faith, he expressed surprise
that Dr Pusey could hold this (I don’t mention
these things as signs of matured opinion in him,
but merely as reminiscences).

One day we had an amusing discussion on the
character of Henry VIII, on persecution etc. On
my saying that the persecutions of Queen Mary’s
reign still had the effect of giving the English peo-
ple a horror of R. Catholicism, he said that
Elizabeth was as much a persecutor. Some one
saying in joke that the R.Cs would persecute now,
he said, ‘Oh no: you know Archbishop Manning\( ^\text{16} \)
spakes very strongly against it.’

In the evening he sometimes played chess
which he was learning – or read poetry. One
Sunday evening he read Pascal, and seemed
pleased with the extreme beauty of the language.

The second Sunday (and the last) that he was
here, instead of going to our church in the after-
noon he walked to Ketton Church,\( ^\text{17} \) as he had
been used to do, with Mr Egerton, Miss Hughes
and Miss Wilkins. Alice and Mabel went part of
the way to meet them. It was a very beautiful
evening, and they did not get home till late. Some
one remarking that the music was imperfect (the
service was choral) he said: ‘I don’t know anything
about music; I like it strongly.

June 20th he went with all our party but me to the
Uppingham School festival and concert.\( ^\text{18} \) They had a very pleasant day, and he seemed thor-
oughly to enjoy it. Amongst others he met Mr
and Mrs Philip Yard [?] there, whom he knew
before, and liked. Just after they had all gone
upstairs to bed (dear Dolben used to sit on a box
at the top of the stairs, outside his room, with
quite a levée round him, amusing them – and I
sometimes heard them laughing downstairs) there
was a ringing at the bell – and two young gentle-
men from Uppingham came in – one very ill. It
was about eleven, and he was so ill that I was
obliged to send for a medical man a mile off – and
then it was necessary to give him a bed. Dolben at

of the Oxford Movement, who was received into the
Catholic church in 1845. Author of several pamphlets in
the series Tracts for the Times (1833–) and Apologia Pro Vita
Sua (1864).

Oratory in 1847. Dolben visited it in September 1866,
though he did not meet Newman.

15. Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800-82). Co-author with
Newman and Keble of Tracts for the Times; co-founder with
them of the Oxford Movement. A High Anglican, but
never followed Newman to Rome, and tried to persuade
others not to secede. ‘No Go’: possibly An Eirenicon, 1865
(Gk. = ‘a proposal made as a means of achieving peace’,
COD), which caused great controversy at the time, and
elicited ‘A Letter to … E. B. Pusey on his recent
Eirenicon’, 1866, by Newman himself.

16. Archbishop Manning (1808-92). Converted to
Catholicism in 1851 and became R.C. Archbishop of
Westminster in 1865; made Cardinal, 1875.

17. Ketton: village c.3 miles from South Luffenham
on the road to Stamford.

18. Uppingham School festival concert: held at
Uppingham School on Thursday 20th June. Dolben
and his companions would have heard a long, mixed pro-
gramme. The first half consisted of sacred music: an anthem
by Sterndale Bennett; Mozart’s Ave Verum, the Air, Terzetto
and Chorus from Mendelssohn’s Elijah and two choruses
from Handel’s Samson; the second half of secular music,
including an overture (unspecified) by Weber, the Ballade
from Sterndale Bennett’s May Queen and works by
Riccius, Haydn, Beethoven, Engels, Schubert and
Mendelssohn.
once asent to give his up – and we made him a bed on the sofa in the diningroom where he slept comfortably. We were late next morning, in consequence of all this. On his coming in to breakfast, the young gentleman said ‘I am afraid I turned you out of your room last night’. ‘Oh no, not at all,’ he said, with a quiet smile. We laughed, for there could be no doubt of the fact.

Whether from this disturbance at night, or not, he had a severe fit of toothache that morning. He tried to read his Sophocles as usual, and did not give up even when I asked him to, but I told him again that mental exertion increased the pain, and got him to lie down on the sofa. He seemed in much pain – and a glass of wine which we persuaded him to try, with quinine, did not relieve it. I got a shawl and covered him, and he lay quiet, but it continued. I then asked him if he would try bathing his face with hot water and laudanum, which I had found relief in: he said he would, and Mrs Prichard got a bandage with laudanum and tied it round his face. ‘Thank you, Mrs Prichard,’ he said – then with a smile – ‘but that is the wrong side’. It was put right, and he said it did him good. He could not however dine with us, but lay on his bed in his room. I went up once or twice to see him and Walter took him some tea, and some beef tea. In the evening he was well, and seemed as usual at teatime.

I never had any directly religious conversation with him since his return. He made an effort to be punctual at family prayer, and seemed to listen with much reverence to the reading of scripture, and his manner at prayer was devout. On the second Sunday I said in the morning that I should like to read with him either some theological work, or part of Scripture. We fixed on the Epistle to the Hebrews, and he read it in order to construe in the evening; but as they were late on their return from Ketton, we did not construe it. He seemed much pleased with the prospect of reading it: and said he had Dr Wordsworth’s Greek Testament,19 and liked it on account of the extracts from the Fathers and in the notes.

He read a good deal of Virgil – this too we had not gone over together – in fact we had hardly got into our work – but he was to have finished the Ajax by the end of the month, and had done a good deal of Latin writing. On general subjects he had far more conversation with Alice than with me.

These very meagre reminiscences are what occur to me. It is a comfort to think that he was happy here, and a privilege I have had a place in his regard and affection. His gentleness, sweetness, delicate courtesy, graceful manners, quickness of mind, his docility, modesty and humility – his playfulness and tenderness and affection – made his presence in our quiet home a constant delight. And now it seems as if an angel had been among us.

He did not strike us as looking forward with any particular interest to his Oxford life. He said he thought he should like Christ Church better than Balliol, but that he had been much annoyed at not getting in at the latter. He did not tell me – what was the case – that he was so ill that he had fainted the same day.20

The last drive we had, a day or two before his death, he was sitting on the box seat, but half turned round and talked to Alice and me most of the way. We talked about ritualism, the commission on it etc., etc.21 He told us about a Greek Archbishop he had seen at St Albans – and a monastery, I think, in Herefordshire.22 After our return, he walked a little with Alice, before tea.

[Here a gap: half a page blank. Then a new page]

I come now to the sad day when he was taken from us, Friday June 28th. He had read as usual, in the morning, the last speech of Ajax, as said above. At dinner I remember him saying, in his gentle, tender voice: Walter at what time shall you have done your lessons, to come and bathe? Walter said – at half past four. He smiled, as if amused at his exactness and said Very well, I will be ready – or something to that effect. After dinner he played croquet with Alice: and was walking up and down the garden, having stopped his game when he saw she was tired, when Walter came up to them. He said, ‘A few minutes more Walter’, to continue his conversation; and then they went. We never saw our beloved friend alive again.

He had been used to bathe almost daily when here before, with Edgell,23 and I knew he was

20. Dolben had fainted whilst taking his Balliol entrance examination six weeks earlier, and thus had been failed to matriculate.
21. Church of England Commission on Ritualism. A Royal Commission on Ritualism was set up in 1867 to enquire into the differences of ceremonial practice in the Church of England.
23. Edgell: Alfred T. Wyatt-Edgell (1849-1928), later 5th Baron Braye. A close friend of Dolben’s at Eton, with similar religious inclinations: converted to Catholicism in 1868. In 1873 he published Amadeus and other poems, whose title poem is an elegy for Dolben; other poems too are concerned with his death. Both Edgell and Dolben were Prichard’s pupils during the summer of 1865 (see footnote 1).
accustomed to swimming. Walter had begun to learn to swim last year in Herefordshire, but could only just lie on his back, and could not swim. Dear Dolben only took him, to please Walter himself, and out of kindness, though I dare say he was amused by his company. On their former walk to bathe, I went to meet them, but they did not come back in time and I missed my walk home with him, which he said he was sorry for, and so was I. I felt no anxiety about him—in fact the thought of danger to him never occurred to me—and probably it would have amused him to have spoken of it. But I had felt some about Walter—and after thinking over it, I reminded dear Dolben that the time when one could just swim a little was a dangerous one, as one was apt to get too far out. He said ‘Yes: he would be careful’ or something to that effect. He was so unselfish and considerate that I felt as if everything was quite safe.

I was writing in the diningroom—even in what I was writing—on the book of Job—thinking occasionally of him—and wondering why they had not come in to tea, when soon after 7 Mr Egerton and Mr Blaydes came into the room. Surprised to see them together I went to meet Mr Blaydes and to ask him to stay there, but could not understand the expression of their faces and manner. Mr Blaydes then said—‘We bring you bad news—it must be told—you little boy is saved.’ I knew at once what had happened, but could hardly believe that there was no hope. My first pang was for his Father: and I felt as if I should have been less overwhelmed if Walter had been taken. After a few hurried questions I ran upstairs to see Walter who was in bed: and questioned him as calmly as I could: then got some blankets, and brandy, and hurried off in Mr Blaydes’ carriage. But all hope had long passed away: in fact I had not been told of the calamity till everyone in the house had known it for some time. On arriving at the spot, 2 miles off, we found a crowd of men there: and Mr Snell, surgeon, with [Revd.] Mr Gedge, and Mr Gill, in a boat dragging the river. I called out and asked if any one could swim. One man was pointed out on the opposite bank who could dive: and after some persuasion, and offering him a reward, he dived—and remained in the water some time searching, but without result. I sent men for additional poles—but it was in

24. The place where they bathed was on the River Welland at the village of Barrowden, some two miles south of South Luffenham.
25. Mr. Blaydes: Frederick Henry Marvell Blaydes (1818-1908), Vicar of Harringworth, a village three miles from Barrowden, from 1843 until 1886. A famous classicist, whose publications included Aristophanis Aves (1843) and Aristophanis Acharnenses (1845). A full account of his extraordinary career can be found in 
P&P9.2, 159-169. What was he doing in Barrowden on that fateful day? Possibly visiting his colleague, Charles Atlay.
26. Mr. Snell: Ebenezer Snell, MRCS, LSA, surgeon, aged 24. He appears to have been a newcomer to the village, for the 1864 Kelly’s PO Directory lists Henry Swan as surgeon, but not Snell. He had previously lived in the Isle of Man (see later in the narrative).
28. Mr. Gill: either Charles Pretty Gill or William Gill. The Gills were prominent members of the Barrowden community, owning the tannery by the water mill. In the 1864 Kelly Directory, Charles Pretty and William Gill are described as ‘fellmongers and woolstaplers’.
29. Poles: probably punt poles. Punts were hired out during the summer on the nearby mill stream (see photographs in the Photograph Collection, Rutland County Museum.)
vain at first — and I sent to Stamford for the drags. At nine or 9½ o’clock Mr Gill and others said that it was quite useless continuing the search — but that they would come next morning and resume it. I was very unwilling to go away — and thought of remaining at least at Barrowden — but they persuaded me to go, just as I had got into the carriage which Miss Wingfield had sent, a shout was raised — and running back to the spot I found that they had discovered the Body of our dear friend. The surgeon was on the spot, and with the blankets, and plaid which I had brought, it was attempted to restore animation, but in vain. I asked Mr Snell if it would make any difference in the chance of restoration if he were removed to the house — and he said no — Indeed he had long given up all hope. We bore him to the carriage, and I got in with him, having covered up the dear remains in blankets, and clothing, and we returned to Luffenham. I could not give up hope of his restoration. Mr Snell accompanied me, and at my urgent request continued the process for restoring animation for some time. But life was long since extinct.

In these sad offices, Mr Egerton was most kindly assisting throughout. Mr Blaydes showed every sympathy and did all that was possible, so kindly assisting throughout. Mr Blaydes showed exterior animation for some time. But life was long since extinct.

On questioning Walter and the men who were in the field: it appears that on getting to the spot, dear D. and Walter undressed. The former got in first — then Walter with a sash round his waist by which Dolben was to hold him. Strange to say, the place was out of their depth, out of Walter’s certainty. After a minute or two either W. asked, or D. proposed that the latter should take him on his back to try if he could swim with him. (He had intended to take him by the sash in one hand, swimming with the other.) On a former day, it seems, W. had asked him if he thought he could do this. He did not ask him now, but Dear D. proposed it, W. tells me. On his getting on he said it was quite easy and (Walter says contrary to his own expectation) he swam across the river with him. W. felt nervous on the way, not having expected that he would do more than swim out a little and back. They rested on the opposite bank — and W. said ‘Are you tired?’ Dolben said ‘not at all, but only out of breath’: and then, after a minute or so, told him to get on his back again. His face had no expression of fatigue or distress of any kind, but he seemed happy, and as usual. On their way back Walter spoke, and he said ‘Do not speak to me’. Soon after, when within 2 or 3 yards of the bank to which they were returning he sank. It was from sudden cramp, the surgeon says.

Walter sank with him, but rising, turned on his back. He felt, while under the water dear D’s hand on his shoulder, and then taken off again. Whether he saw him rise once, or not, I cannot clearly make out. After lying some time, W. remembered the mowers whom they had passed in the field, and cried out. At first they thought it was in play, but on hearing it again, they ran to the bank — they were perhaps 100 yards off or more. They saw Walter, his face just above the water. He must have sunk in another minute or two in human probability. They told him to try to get nearer the bank. He had to swim out another minute or two in human probability. They told him to try to get nearer, and he struck out, still lying on his back, and after some struggling, they drew him to the bank by a pitchfork put round the lily stems. One of them says his head was supported, and could not swim, from the bottom of rivers or pools; esp. for recovering the bodies of drowned persons.’ Several riverside towns had set up stations containing ‘apparatus, cases, drags, boards, etc.’ in case of such emergencies, the riverside equivalent of lifeboats and fire-engines:

‘We had the drags at once, and set to work to recover the remains.’

Conan Doyle, The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes, 1894

30. Drags: OED: ‘An apparatus for recovering objects from the bottom of rivers or pools; esp. for recovering the bodies of drowned persons.’ Several riverside towns had set up stations containing ‘apparatus, cases, drags, boards, etc.’ in case of such emergencies, the riverside equivalent of lifeboats and fire-engines:

31. Miss Wingfield: the Miss Wingfields were tenants of South Luffenham Hall. White’s Directory (1846) says that Colonel Wingfield and his three daughters, Caroline Henrietta, Sarah and Mary Ann occupied the Hall. The Colonel was still alive in 1858 (Slater’s Directory of Rutland 1861) but Briggs Gazetteer and Directory (1861) mentions only the Miss Wingfields.

32. Atlay: Charles Atlay (1792-1870), Rector of Barrowden 1840-1870.

33. Bridges says he ‘fainted’, but at the inquest Snell reported that he had been seized with cramp (see transcript of Inquest report, Northampton Herald, 6 July 1867, below).
and they never saw dear D. Walter was extremely agitated, and seemed to have almost lost his senses. While they were ... rubbing him, he kept exclaiming about his companion. As the man expressed it, 'they could not pacify him' for a long time.

Some days after he had a severe illness from nervous agitation.

The burial of our dear young friend took place at Finedon on Saturday July 6th.36 He lies under the altar.37

This is the sad, sad narrative. The only comfort is in dwelling on the grace given to him who was removed so suddenly, and on God's Love. He believed in Jesus Christ strongly, had deep penitence, earnest love, hunger and thirst after righteousness. He would, there is every reason to think, have devoted his life, if it had been spared, and his [word indecipherable], with incessant devotion. Surely it would be want of faith to doubt that he is but removed to a nearer enjoyment of His Presence, where his gifts and graces have full exercise – or waits in a blessed rest for the consummation of all things.

May God give him abundant peace and consolation and blessing in Paradise, and make us worthy to join him.

35. At this point, several leaves have been cut out and when the writing begins again ('rubbing him ...') on a new page, a different nib thickness is evident, as though Prichard had cut out the original and revised it.
36. On the following day, Sunday July 7th, Prichard preached a sermon at South Luffenham in Dolben's memory.
37. He was buried in the family vault at Finedon church; 35 years later, on the death of his mother (1892), Dolben's remains and those of his brother, William, were moved to the Old Cemetery across the road from the church.

The Aftermath

Tell this story
Of death and ruin to my aged father
And to my sorrowing mother. She will weep,
Ah how she will weep, when she hears of this.

Sophocles: Ajax

After Dolben's body was recovered, it was taken by carriage to Luffenham Rectory, and on the following evening an inquest was held at the Halfway House Inn, just across the road. The following is a transcript of the proceedings as reported in The Northampton Herald for Saturday, 6th July:

MELANCHOLY CASE OF DROWNING.

An inquest was held at the Halfway-house, South Luffenham, on Saturday evening, before Wm. Shield, Esq., coroner, on the body of Digby Augustus Stewart, second surviving son of W. H. Isham Mackworth-Dolben, Esq., of Finedon Hall, near Kettering. The deceased, who was 19 years of age, was private pupil with the Rev. C. E. Prichard, rector of the above parish. Between five and six o'clock on Friday evening he, accompanied by Walter, aged 10 years, eldest son of Mr P, proceeded to the river Welland, in the adjoining parish of Barrowden, to bathe. Deceased was a good swimmer, and entered the water, having Master Prichard, who could not swim, upon his back. They were seen by some mowers in the employ of Mr. Shelton to leave the water on the Northamptonshire side. A few minutes afterwards the mowers heard a cry of distress, and hastened to the place whence, as they supposed, the noise proceeded, where they found Master Prichard, lying on the water upon some lily leaves, but his companion could not be seen. The water was very deep, and as the labourers could not swim there was a difficulty in immediately rescuing the young gentleman. With the aid of a hayfork, however, which he seized, Prichard was drawn to the bank, and thus rescued. Drags were sent for, and the dead body of Mr. Digby Dolben was found about three hours afterwards. It appeared from the evidence of Master Prichard that when returning to the Rutland side of the
river, being in the same position as before, he spoke to deceased, but receiving no answer, he looked at him and found his face in the water: he instantly sank, and from that time Master Prichard could not recollect anything till after he was rescued. Mr. Snell, surgeon, of Barrowden, who was present when the dead body was taken from the water, said deceased had evidently been seized with cramp, as shown by the contraction of one of the legs. Verdict, ‘Accidental death.’ Immediately after the inquest the corpse was conveyed in a hearse to Finedon for interment.

Though the official cause of drowning was given as ‘cramp’, there may well have been other contributory factors. He may have fainted – he did so whilst taking the Balliol entrance examination a few weeks earlier – or he may have had a stroke; or maybe he had become entangled in the lily-stems. Regarding his final act of saving Walter from drowning, asserted by Walter at the time and 40 years later (see below), the boy was very frightened at the time – ‘extremely agitated, and seemed almost to have lost his senses’ – and suffered a ‘severe illness’ immediately afterwards. In the circumstances, he was not a good witness and subsequently the ‘rescue’ has become mythologised. One later account even goes so far as to state ‘There were water-lilies near, and amongst them he was able to put the child’ (NRO/D(F)112).

Digby’s body was buried in the family vault at Finedon the following Saturday, 6th July, with, of course, Anglican rites. During that last fortnight of his life he not only wrote his last three poems, but also left an unfinished letter (since lost) to his father. In it he asked for release from his promise to defer being received into the Catholic church, begging that at least he might for his soul’s sake have leave to take that step in case of impending grave illness or accident. The day after the burial, Prichard preached a sermon at South Luffenham church in Dolben’s memory. Fortunately someone made a transcript and sent it to the Dolben family (NRO/D(F)2). In it Prichard pays tribute to ‘the noble serenity of his character’, his ‘princely carelessness of petty things’ and his affection for his family and home. He mentions his poetry and how it encapsulated his religious beliefs and hopes, and picks out ‘a Beautiful Hymn to “The Babe of Bethlehem”’ [*Homo factus est* (C6): numberings of poems refer to Martin Cohen’s *The Poems and Letters of Digby Mackworth Dolben, 1981*]:

written in a boy’s handwriting, at Eton [which] expresses with rare sweetness his pure and ardent love: and until the last, for it breaks out again passionately in lines written only a few days before his death.

His personal love of Christ and implicit trust in Him was perhaps the ruling characteristic of his mind and heart:

Come to me Beloved
Babe of Bethlehem

He concludes the sermon by referring to another early poem, ‘Vocation AD’ (C14):

Thus would I strive, if Thou, dear Lord, permit
To set the world a-glow for love of Thee.

But the most telling passage comes when Prichard expresses his own personal feeling, contrasting the beautiful summer weather with the intense grief felt by Dolben’s friends:

To me, if I may allude to my own feelings, the beauty and glory of these summer days have awakened a feeling of most intense sadness – as if a light more beautiful than that of the sun or the glow of flowers – had passed away from earth – nay and an emotion also, an unreasoning one indeed – rather perhaps a natural instrument of the deepest pity, as if one, who was in an unusual degree gifted with enjoyment of earthly beauty was suddenly taken from it, as if both the Gift and the Beauty were in vain …

There is great poignancy in these words. One feels that Prichard is finding it difficult to hold on to his own beliefs, that he has lost sight of his God. This is reflected, too, in some verses in memory of Dolben, which he wrote at the same time, ‘In Memoriam, spem, amorem’. These eventually came into the
ownership of Vincent Coles who sent them to Bridges when he was compiling his Memoir (Bodl./Bridges Deposit 54, fol. 112). Bridges did not find space, or perhaps have the desire – Prichard was by no means a poet – to include it, but in certain passages of this long blank verse elegy there are flashes of deep emotion:

Thanks, gentle friend, dearest companion, thanks
For the pure love (with keenest sorrow mix’d)
Stronger than death, that draws our yearning hearts
Here onwards, which from its depth Hope, like a star
From the dark azure, sheds her ray serene …
There is a poem written not in words
Nor shin’d in spoken music of sweet verse,
But in the secret record of such life
That strives to rise and follow where the voice
calls from the heights above. In this, sweet child
Of grace and nature, met two gifts divine,
The poet’s utterance, and the strong pure will
Whose chord, responsive to the voice of God,
Gave full the Spirit’s music …

Like the sermon, it is a heartfelt tribute to a remarkable youth nearly thirty years his junior, whose character and talents and almost saint-like devotion touched everyone who met him.

Prichard never recovered from this tragedy, in which he lost not only a friend and pupil, but almost lost his only son. Though we have no documentation of Prichard’s final years, we do have an eyewitness account of him immediately after Dolben’s death, from W.B. Gamlen, who had been Prichard’s pupil in 1863 and who had met Dolben during a visit to South Luffenham at Easter 1865. In a letter to Bridges, 6th November 1911, he wrote:

In Michaelmas term 1867, I met Prichard quite unexpectedly in Broad Street [Oxford]; and after exchanging greeting my first question was, And how is Dolben? He looked upon me with an agonized expression – I thought he was going to faint, – and then with a gasp said, What, don’t you know? As soon as he had somewhat collected himself he went on to tell me the story of Dolben’s death, and of his own son’s narrow escape.

(Bridges, 1915: cxvii)

Prichard’s health seems to have deteriorated rapidly over the following 18 months. His last burial entry in the South Luffenham parish register was on 25th July 1867; his last baptismal entry on 18th March 1868. His curate, Charles Egerton, took over from this point and by August 1869 W.B. Scott, his successor as rector, had been installed. Prichard moved to the south coast to try to recover his health, but died at Christchurch on 6th October 1869, from haemorrhage from the lungs, aged 49. He left a wife and young family; Alice would have been 36 and Walter three weeks from his 13th birthday. In a letter written at the time, Walter Bagehot, his childhood friend, observed: 'Constantine Prichard is dead, leaving a large family not well off; I fear. The old world of our youth breaks up, and the best people get the worst of it.' (Barrington, 1914:393). Alice moved from Luffenham and in 1912, when Bridges was researching his memoir, was living in Cheltenham. Walter went on to Rugby School, then to Queen’s College, Oxford, where he was an Exhibitioner, 1875–9. But the events of 28th June 1867 remained with him, and in January 1912, forty years on, he wrote a revealing letter to his aunt Edy, Constantine’s sister, from his home in Sidmouth:

Jan. 24 1912
Sidmouth

My dear Aunt Edy

I was delighted to receive your kind letter. – I always am – I do not know whether my personal reminiscences of Digby Mackworth Dolben are of any value to anybody. Possibly they might be.

Anyhow D.M.D. was drowned in the river Welland – with me on his back on June 28 1867. I was then – not eight years old, but 10 years and eight months.

I remember many circumstances of this most grievous & most lamentable accident, as well as if it had happened last month.
Digby Dolben swam across a deep and rather broad pool, with me sitting on his back. Arriving at the further bank, we stood for a minute or two in the mud with the water up to his waist & my shoulders. Then he said, ‘Come on – I will swim back with you.’ I said ‘Are you tired?’ & he replied, ‘no, not tired, but out of breath.’ Halfway back I saw – with terror – that the water was above his nose.

We both went down in an unknown depth[,] he with his hand on my shoulder which he withdrew. There was no struggle either on his part or mine. He died trying to save me.

I came up again, and remembering that [?] had tried to teach me to float, I tried again. I succeeded.

Putting aside the foregoing which is, perhaps unavoidably egotistical – I remember DMD with extraordinary distinctness. He had a small oratory in his bedroom, and a face of much beauty & refinement. Moreover he was a strong athletic man – or rather boy – I think he was 18 when he died.

He is mentioned in Life of Lord Randolph Churchill …

In my (poor) judgement. DMD was a saint, like S Francis of Assisi.

(Bodl./Bridges Deposit 54. fol. 110)

What about Dolben’s own family? All three of William and Frances Dolben’s sons predeceased them. The eldest, William Digby (1839-63) was also drowned, whilst serving in the Royal Navy (it is said that a seal struck his boat in the River Niger near Lagos capsizing it). Their second son, Herbert (1842-70), contracted tuberculosis and died at Bournemouth in 1870. The deaths of their sons affected them both enormously. Digby’s death especially affected Frances, for the two were particularly close and several of Digby’s poems were written for, or refer to her: ‘In the garden’ (C25), ‘The shrine’ (C61) and the ‘snowdrops’ section (lines 156-168) of ‘Dum agonizatur anima’ (C69). It is recorded that, after his death, she ‘hardly ever…lifted her eyes from the ground’ (NRO/D(F)112). William Mackworth died in 1872, Frances 20 years later. In order that her body could lie next to her husband’s, the bodies of Herbert and Digby were exhumed from the family vault and reburied in the ‘Old Cemetery’ across the road from the church. Their sister, Ellen, lived on until 1912, the last of the Dolben line. After her death, Finedon Hall was sold and the estate broken up. The grounds, with their famous holly walk and magnificent avenues of chestnuts, elms and limes, were built upon and developed. The house itself, after various vicissitudes, was converted into private apartments.

Dolben’s death came as a shock to his many friends. Bridges was in Paris at the time, competing in an eight-oared race on the Seine and so was unable to attend the funeral. Hopkins was – quite independently – in Paris, too, visiting the Universal Exhibition at the Champs de Mars, and did not hear of his death until he returned to find a letter from Vincent Coles waiting for him. On 30th August, he wrote to Bridges:

Dear Bridges, – I heard of Dolben’s death the day I returned from Paris by a letter from Coles which had been a week waiting for me. Edgell has since written me a few more particulars … There is very little I have to say. I looked forward to meeting Dolben and his being a Catholic more than to anything. At the same time from never having met him but once I find it difficult to realise his death or feel as if it were anything to me. You know there can very seldom have happened the loss of so much beauty (in body and mind and life) and of the promise of still more as there has been in his case – seldom I mean, in the whole world, for the conditions would not easily come together. At the same time he had gone on in a way which was wholly and unhappily irrational. I want to know whether his family think of gathering and publishing, or at least printing, his poetry. Perhaps you will like to hear what Dr. Newman says. ‘Yes, we heard all about Dolben. The account was very pleasant. He had not given up the idea of being a Catholic, but he thought he had lived on excitement, and felt he must give himself time before he could know whether he
was in earnest or not. This does not seem to me a wrong frame of mind. He was up to his death careful in his devotional exercises. I never saw him. 'Some day I hope to see Finedon and the place where he was drowned too. Can you tell me where he was buried? – at Finedon, was it not? If you have letters from him will you let me see them some day? … When you write let me hear everything you have to tell. Believe me always your affectionate friend,

Gerard Manley Hopkins

The memory of the impetuous young man remained with Hopkins for many years and, as late as September 1873, he was writing in his journal: 'I received as I think a great mercy about Dolben' (i.e. a sign that his prayer for the eternal welfare of his friend was heard).

Wyatt-Edgell's reaction found expression in poetry. In 1873 he published *Amadeus and other poems*, the title poem of which is an elegy on Dolben's death:

Begin the lay, ye melancholy reeds,
That gently whisper by the Welland's brim.

Several of the other poems – 'Desiderium', 'Eton School Days' and 'Born in February; Died in June' – were also inspired by Dolben's death. The one Eton friend who seems not to have been unduly affected – certainly not publicly – was Dolben's Eton amour, Marchie Gosselin. His reply to Coles, who had written to him with the news, was cold and impersonal. As Martin (1991) says, 'One wonders whether he had ever returned any of the affection Dolben lavished on him'.

Coda: A Visit to Luffenham

In his letter to Bridges, Hopkins wrote that he hoped to see the place where Dolben was drowned, but he never did. In the summer of 1997 I made two visits there myself. South Luffenham lies between Uppingham and Stamford on the A6121. 'The Halfway House', where the inquest was held, is still there, opposite the rectory, which is now a private residence, 'Copper Beech'. The church of St Mary the Virgin has altered little since Prichard was rector. The organ is new, installed during the rectorship of Rev. Hudson Shaw (1898-1907), but the font and Culpepper effigy have been in the church since the 14th century and the marble memorial to Rose Boswell, the 17-year-old daughter of the King of the Gipsies, has been there for over 200 years. In fact most of the changes to the church interior took place in 1861 during Prichard's incumbency, when the church was restored. In Thomas Hardy's words it was 'scalped and scraped': the plaster was taken from the walls, the chancel screen removed, pine pews replaced the old box pews, the bells were recast and a new pulpit in Clipsham stone erected. These changes would have been new when Dolben attended the church during his visits in 1865 and 1867.

But if Hopkins had carried out his wish to see the place where Dolben was drowned, it would not, of course, have been at South Luffenham. The village has no river deep or wide enough to bathe in: the River Chater, which flows between North and South Luffenham, is no more than a stream. The place where Dolben, Gamlen and Edgell and other pupils of Prichard went to bathe was two miles to the south of Luffenham, in the village of Barrowden, on the Rutland side of the county boundary with Northamptonshire, the River Welland. The four-mile round trip for a bathe may seem far to us today, but it was no distance for healthy youngsters in the 1860s. From the rectory, they would have crossed the Uppingham-Ketton road and taken the lane to Barrowden; the 'Barrowden Road' as far as the present-day A47, the 'Luffenham Road' for the final stretch. This track was known as 'The Drift' and, before enclosure (1882), traversed open fields.

Where did they bathe? As Gamlen rightly remembered, the Welland here 'scarcely deserves to be called a river.' 'My recollection,' he wrote to Bridges, 'is of a sluggish brook, which at the place we used to bathe expanded into a deep pool which you could swim across in a few strokes.' (Bridges, op. cit.: cxvii). There is only one place on the river at Barrowden that fits this description. To reach it today, you need to cross the river by the footbridge near the old mill, then turn right and follow the river upstream for a hundred
yards or so through river meadows ('liable to floods') to what is now a complex of weirs and watergates (identified by the Environmental Agency as 'Barrowden Siphons'). Here the river broadens out into a large, deep pool known locally as Top Wash. The original Ordnance Survey maps show that this pool was present in Dolben's day (Figure 5).

Digby and Walter, however, probably reached the pool by a more direct route, through what today would be private property, for it is clear from the accounts given by Walter (1867 and 1912) that they started their swim from the Rutland side of the river. Possibly they reached Top Wash through the glebe meadow below the church, a meadow still cut for hay and used to 'rush-strew' the church for St Peter's Day.

This is the only possible place to swim in this early stretch of the Welland. It is a natural bathing-pool and, indeed, it is still used by local people today. There is a photograph of children paddling there in a recent village history (Rhodes, 1997) and when I visited it in August 1997, there were bathers, despite a large sign warning 'No Swimming' (Figure 6(a)). Ironically there is an Environmental Agency life belt on a post in case of emergency – something not available on 28th June 1867 for the local mowers to use.

This, then, is almost certainly 'Dolben's Pool'. It is still an idyllic rural spot, surrounded by reeds and rushes, in the summer by forgetmenots, greater yellowcress and hemp agrimony; duckweed floats on the surface. When I came in June a heron flew up as I walked upstream and redshank called from further along. From the poolside, the spire of St Peter's Church can be seen. On the southern side of the meadow is the embankment of a dismantled railway, the Seaton and Wansford branch of the L&NW Railway. It would not have been there in Dolben's day; it was not opened until 1879.

Figure 5: Ordnance Survey map of Barrowden (2nd ed. 1900, surveyed 1884). 'Dolben's Pool' ('Top Wash') is at the lower centre of the map ('EB:Weir'); the road to South Luffenham at the top centre (above 'Smithy' and 'Pinfold')
Figures 6(a) and (b): Barrowden, ‘Dolben’s Pool’ (‘Top Wash’), photographed in August 1997. (Trevor Hold)
It is ironic that Dolben’s death resulted from drowning in a river. He was, as we’ve seen, an accomplished swimmer – swimming was his one and only sport – and as a poet he was first and foremost a ‘River Poet’ (see D(F)112). This is perhaps unexpected, for his childhood home, Finedon, has no river, only a small brook, the Ise, which divides it from its larger neighbour, the town of Wellingborough. But poems about water – streams, pools and rivers – and with aquarelle imagery abound. Many of them incorporate references to water lilies, certainly his favourite poetic flower:

I love the river as it lies
So still, and clear, and deep,
There, where beneath the willow boughs
The yellow lilies sleep.

‘He showed me a pure river’ (C7)

On river banks my love was born …
Beneath him lily islands spread,
With broad cool leaves, a floating bed.

‘From DMD … To LMG …’ (C21)

‘The Lily’ (C46) is almost premonitory in its subject-matter:

Once, on the river banks we knew,
A child, who laughing ran to choose

A lily there, essayed to tread
The lawn of leaves that outward spread
To where the very fairest blew –
And slipped from love and life and light,
Into the shiny depth beneath –
While through the tangle and the ooze
Up bubbled all his little breath …

as is the imagery in ‘Methought, through many years and lands’ (C81):

Methought, through many years and lands,
I sped along an arrowy flood, –
That leapt and lapt my face and hands,
I knew not, were it fire or blood.

I saw no sun in any place –
A ghastly glow about me spread,
(Unlike the light of nights and days)
From out the depth where writhe the dead.

I passed – their fleshless arms uprose
To draw me to the depths beneath;
Mine eyes forgot the power to close
Like other men’s, in sleep or death …

This was the last poem he wrote, just a day or so before he was drowned. In the circumstances it is, if not prophetic, then cruelly ironic. In his death, life and art seem to have become enmeshed.

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The Northampton Women’s Social and Political Union, 1912-1914

RICHARD WHITMORE

In the politically turbulent years between the death of Queen Victoria and the out-break of the First World War, the old, reassuring constraints of Victorian Britain were very near to collapse and to historians, like Dangerfield, England appeared to be tottering on the brink of revolution. Yet, despite the rhetoric of those turbulent years, no political reform group is identified more with Edwardian Britain than that of the suffragettes. The image of the middle-class suffragette chained to the railings outside No. 10 Downing Street, rebelling against the legacy of Victorian double standards and the inferior position of women within society, has always been a powerful icon to later generations of militant feminists. However, this vision was, by and large, instigated by the Pankhursts’ Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU). Not content with following in the footsteps of other, older suffrage societies, the WSPU embarked on a long and often violent suffrage campaign that not only highlighted the problems faced by many women, but also repelled the many influential people of power and respectability who might have helped. But what they undoubtedly did was to stamp an indelible image of the ‘Shrieking Sisterhood’ on the collective minds of the population as a whole.

Such images, however, had a much wider implication, in that the perception of the London suffragettes in full revolt effectively concealed the scope and depth to which provincial women were involved in the militant campaign. The activities of the suffragette acolytes revolving around the Pankhurs in London have been well documented, and when reading accounts of the women’s struggle for the vote in Edwardian England, the reader might well be forgiven for believing that the suffrage campaign in general, and the Pankhurs’ Women’s Social and Political Union in particular, were confined to the capital with little or no reference to the rest of the country. However, to understand the movement more fully, a wider picture is often needed and this can only be achieved by studying at a local level the histories and motivations behind the women involved. Only then will we be better able to trace the political origins of the agitators and understand the experiences which brought women to the suffrage cause.2

In Northampton, as in other Midland towns of similar make-up, the WSPU was able to establish a local branch, but unlike other towns within the region, the group was to be radically different in two important ways. Firstly, the branch was comparatively late in coming and was not formed until the end of 1911 and secondly, in a political sense it was to be radically unique in its pursuit of the franchise.

For the outset of the militant campaign, the women of Northampton had always remained elusive, and despite earlier attempts during 19083 little by the way of a WSPU branch had been established. However, over the years, both Leicester and Nottingham WSPU branches continually sent delegates in an attempt to establish a Northampton branch. In 1910, for example, Miss Burgess, a Nottingham school teacher, and Dorothy Pethick from Leicester, with the help of a


3. Two suffragettes, a Miss Lambert and Miss Sidley attempted to organise a meeting in Northampton for Emmeline Pankhurst to come and talk, but they were badly hustled and beaten. Miss Sidley received a nasty blow on the face from a missile thrown from the crowd. The mood had deteriorated to such an extent that they had to seek police protection to escape, Northampton Guardian, 12 March 1908.
local woman, Mrs. Sabins Branch of Abington Park, Northampton, set up a temporary HQ at 13 Bridge Street and began a concerted campaign to interest local women.5

Adopting tried and tested methods of open-air meetings around the market-place and factory gates; these women began their campaign on 4th January, but were met by a wall of hostility that threatened to spill over into violence. Mirroring the events of July 1909, when Nellie Crocker and Georgina Brackenbury challenged the local youths to a stand-up fistfight around the fountain,6 the speakers were pelted with missiles and prevented from speaking. However, some stirrings of interest were made amongst local women, and when Christabel Pankhurst arrived to speak at the Town Hall the following Saturday, the meeting was sold out.

Unfortunately for Northampton, she was unable to attend the meeting due to the death of her younger brother and instead, Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence took her place on the rostrum.7 On this point it might be worth speculating that had she been able to attend, and given her charismatic charm, a Northampton branch might well have been established a good 12 months before it finally was. Indeed, the mood and climate of the WSPU campaign at that time very much suited the Liberal temperaments of many of the women who would later form the branch. But instead, the meetings and debates focused at working women, for the most part, went unheeded. As one suffragette, Miss Evans, lamented after speaking at the gates of Messrs. Sears one lunch-time, ‘Very few working women appeared interested in my lecture.’8

4. There were two Mrs. Branch’s in the Northampton WSPU and it’s unknown if they were related. One was Mrs. E. Branch, aged around 40 and married to Herbert Branch who owned a small boot and shoe factory in Henry Street. She became the group’s Organising Secretary and had previously been an officer in the Women’s Liberal Association. They lived at Hill House, Kingsthorpe.


It is extremely difficult to understand the reasons for this apathy amongst working women, but social and economic disparity certainly played its part. Leaving aside the later involvement of the boot and shoe trade union in campaigning for higher female wages in 1911, according to Don Stanton, a member of the Arbitration Board around 1903, Northampton paid the lowest female wages, while the cost of living was 10 percent higher than in other comparable places.9

Without doubt, this was a major factor in recruiting working women, but in other areas inroads were being made, and much of the work done at this time was to hold the WSPU in good stead when they returned for a third campaign at the end of 1911. Unfortunately the campaign failed, when the Leicester suffragette, Elsie Miller, possibly on the advice of two trade unionists and fellow WSPU members, Alice Hawkins and Lizzie Wilson, focused on the working women in Thrapston and Kettering in the belief that these women were the most sympathetic to the cause.

At first, according to Elsie Miller, the campaign "promised well"10 and by the end of October 1911 a branch was originally formed in Kettering around a few working women in the boot and shoe trade. Unfortunately, within a few weeks, her earlier optimism proved misplaced and the group fizzled out. Without tangible evidence, it is difficult to know precisely why the group disbanded, but one reason for this failure could be lack of finance. During the early part of November, Miss Hughes, one of the Leicester campaigners appealed to her branch in Leicester for financial assistance11 but, in real terms, little could be done and by the end of November the Thrapston and Kettering branch was all but finished and valuable time was lost.

Nevertheless, unwilling to give up on Northamptonshire completely, Elsie Miller

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10. *Votes For Women*, 3 March 1911.

11. *Votes For Women*, 3 November 1911.
and Miss Hughes moved to 305 Wellingborough Road, Northampton to try again. Here the response was more positive and Miss Miller was able to report that the nucleus of the Northampton branch had been formed by the end of the year.\textsuperscript{12} From a report in the \textit{Northampton Daily Chronicle},\textsuperscript{13} it is possible to know that the first meeting took place at the home of Mrs. Crockett at East Park Parade on 11th December 1911 and was largely middle-class in composition. Moreover, the group also reflected the wide spectrum of political ideologies within the town. For example, on the one hand, Mrs. Agnes Croft represented the Labour Party, while Mrs. Collier, Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Butterfield represented the Conservative Primrose League. The rest, like Mrs. Brooks, Mrs. Buswell, Mrs. Gubbins and Mrs. Beattie represented the Women’s Liberal Association and a variety of different charitable and philanthropic societies around Northampton.\textsuperscript{14}

Indeed, the Northampton branch, in a direct antithesis to the Leicester group, was founded on a different type of radicalism that had developed from a wider Chartist-non-conformist freethinking Liberalism that had been active since the late 1840s. As Edward Royle has pointed out in \textit{Charles Bradlaugh, Freethought and Northampton},

\begin{flushleft}Northampton was primarily independent because of its traditions based on the structure of small-scale workshop employment...[and] the political habits of shoemakers who had been voting Liberal since before 1832 and whose rural backgrounds were decidedly anti-aristocratic (which in Northamptonshire meant anti-Whig and anti-Church of England).\textsuperscript{15}\end{flushleft}

As a result, the women within the Northampton WSPU were to be entirely reflective of this traditional Liberal background and believed that it was within the individual to take responsibility for attaining self-improvement. But that also meant working within the confines of respectable politics and a moral goodness to establish a spirit of civic virtue. This rigid ideology was amply seen within the branch almost from its inception towards the end of 1912 to June 1914, when the local women pointedly refused and rejected the call to militancy with an unusual frankness.

For them, Christabel Pankhurst had moved the WSPU beyond the concept of a common good and sought, through the use of extreme militancy and the destruction of private property, a limited franchise that would do little to promote a wider cause. Nor was the assault on private property a tactic that these women could in all conscience follow. Instead, they had come from a strong radical Liberal tradition synonymous with Bradlaugh that taught responsible, law-abiding principles and all notions of illegal

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{WSPU Member} & \textbf{Husband’s Occupation} \\
\hline
Mrs. Garrett & Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer \\
Mrs. Gubbins & Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer \\
Mrs. Branch & Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer \\
Mrs. Mabel Crockett & Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer \\
Mrs. Church & Member of the Church Boot and Shoe Family \\
Mrs. Collier & Small Family Boot and Shoe Manufacturer \\
Mrs. Tebbutt & Boot and Shoe Foreman \\
Mrs. Clarke & Boot and Shoe Foreman \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textbf{Table 1: Occupation of WSPU members’ husbands}

\textsuperscript{12.} \textit{Northampton Mercury}, 22 December 1911.
\textsuperscript{13.} One member, Mrs. Butterfield, was married to the proprietor of the \textit{Northampton Daily Chronicle}.
\textsuperscript{14.} \textit{Northampton Daily Chronicle}, 11 December 1911.
activity were therefore immoral and hence, unjustifiable.

For these women, an obligation to obey the law was paramount and the Pankhursts’ claims to a right to disobey the law was a claim to a right to thwart the principles of that law. As Nonconformist Liberals for the most part, they were free to disagree with the law, but not free to disobey it. They had, like their Leicester contemporaries, looked towards the inequality with men, but failed to see its implications within their own lives. They were far too provincial and, perhaps more significantly, middle-aged to have been influenced by the angry, radical and Bohemian ways of the London suffragettes who argued that the subordination of women more than warranted civil disobedience. Nor were they oppressed economically or socially and, for many, a comfortable lifestyle more than retarded any feelings of outrage at social injustice.

Instead, the group remained much as any other non-militant group might have done, and as a consequence did little in the way of militant acts. Indeed, the few sporadic outbreaks amounted to little more than a poor pastiche of other groups. Nor did the local WSPU seek to identify itself with working women, let alone seek to address their grievances. Instead, they contented themselves with minor meetings that, upon reflection, did little more than mildly criticise the Liberal Government. Whether this rather sedate attitude had an off-putting effect on other, more militantly inclined women around the town is hard to say, but very few emerged to take the lead. Of course there were a few women, notably Agnes Croft and Mabel Crockett who both participated in large London demonstrations and committed militant acts, but they consistently lacked the fire and commitment of other suffragettes within the region.

Of course, another reason for this mild approach and their failure to recruit active militants might be found in the lack of direct leadership from London. Indeed, Elsie Miller had only travelled down from Leicester, not London. The experience of both Leicester and Nottingham’s WSPU’s clearly demonstrated the importance of strong leadership, for in both towns their development shows just how important these professional organisers were. Not only did they dictate local policies by focusing the branch around a common cause, they also provided an important role model for the younger, potentially more radical women who were drawn to the branch with the prospects of danger and adventure. The Northampton branch was to be denied the important influence of a professional London radical as a local organiser. This was an important omission in their education and undoubtedly retarded any militant sympathisers that might have developed at a later date.

But more likely, the real reason why the national leadership appeared reluctant to actively invest a large amount of time and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Husbands of WSPU Members</th>
<th>Political Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>George Wilson Beattie</td>
<td>Liberal Mayor of Northampton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henry Butterfield</td>
<td>Alderman, Northampton Town Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Collier</td>
<td>Conservative Councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Brown</td>
<td>Liberal Mayor of Northampton</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mr. Buswell</td>
<td>Liberal Councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred Cockerill</td>
<td>Alderman, Northampton Town Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harold Croft</td>
<td>Labour Councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frederick Ellen</td>
<td>Conservative Councillor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter Gubbins</td>
<td>Member Northampton Liberal Association and Liberal Councillor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
money in the branch was for the direct opposite reason why they spent time and effort in other areas. They could see that it would never fulfil its real potential. Almost from the outset Christabel Pankhurst could see that the conditions that prevailed in Northampton would hinder the branch no matter what they did. As a London radical lamented in May 1914:

They used to look upon Northampton as a pretty progressive place, but now I am afraid it is now far behind the times. If Bradlaugh was still alive, I'm sure he would say 'Northampton wake up!'

Consequently, the new Northampton branch was unlike its parent organisation in Leicester and Nottingham, yet in some ways it was much the same. Like Leicester, it had been formed around the boot and shoe industry, and many of its members were either engaged in the manufacture of boots and shoes or their husbands were (Table 1), like Mrs. Margaret Tebbutt, who lived along St Matthew’s Parade in Northampton. Her husband, a member of the Foreman’s Association, belonged to the labour aristocracy and was a foreman at a local Boot and Shoe Manufacturer within the town.

This is another important point and serves to underlie the difficulty of recruiting these women for militant acts. Indeed, at least seven other members’ husbands were involved in the manufacture of boots and shoes in small family concerns while others belonged to Northampton’s political oligarchy (see Table 2).

Thus, when called upon to commit criminal acts against property, they reacted with indignation and horror. Indeed, no amount of persuasion by the national leadership could talk them round, although this might well have had something to do with the fact that one of their members, Mrs. Mardlin, of 11 St Giles Street, was married to the Chief Constable of Northampton.

Thus, when Lady Margesson a London militant descended on them in February 1912, at the home of one of their members, Mrs. Bensley in Sheep Street, to justify the orders of Christabel, both Mrs. Beattie and Mrs. Rose Tebbutt publicly criticised the actions of the militants as ‘awful hooliganism’ and told the meeting that Lady Margesson’s speech had not convinced them that militancy was the right and proper course. Some time later, in an open letter to the Northampton Daily Chronicle, Mrs. Tebbutt defended her actions and rebuked Elsie Miller’s accusation that she had no right to pass judgement on the militants when she just sat at home and did nothing. ‘No cause, however good,’ she wrote, ‘could justify women stooping to what many people regard as ‘hooliganism’. That, to me, it is not so much the fact of their wrapping up their stones in paper which matters, as the fact that they have lowered themselves by the throwing of those stones’ (sic). She went on to attack the leadership in person and declared that:

Mrs. Pankhurst and her prototypes are a danger to the community, their influence has worked unhappiness in homes that once were happy … but I grieve for those women … who are suffering in prison through the instrumentality of the ring-leaders.

The day following the meeting at Mrs. Bensley’s home, Christabel Pankhurst arrived at the Palace Theatre to try and appeal to the Northampton branch herself, and with some insight into the problem, addressed the women’s husbands who were there. In a rousing speech she implored the men when she said,

I know some of you do not believe in our methods. Now you men, do not go home and in front of your fire lay it down to your women folk that our methods are...
wrong ... We could not get the vote by constitutional methods because we have no constitutional weapon. Because we do not have the vote, we cannot get the vote. 23

However, even the eloquent Christabel could not get the women, or indeed the men, to change their minds. Undeterred, Christabel philosophically reflected that the time was not yet right and when

Northampton thinks our cause is right, and that is only a matter of time, it will be significant, because what Northampton thinks, politically ... matters very much. 24

Unfortunately for Christabel and the WSPU, the Northampton branch failed to supply the promised radicals, and although the group remained in place to 1914, militancy of the new kind was, by and large, rejected throughout the period. Of course, some women, like Mrs. Croft, wife of the local Independent Labour Party organiser 25 and Mrs. Collier, a former member of the Primrose League, somewhat lamely defended the militant actions of the WSPU, but in reality, Northampton suffered no real militant actions.

On the other hand, this restraint was to hold them in good stead when it came to seeking support from the Trades' Council and the Independent Labour Party against the Cat and Mouse Act. Indeed, the Northampton Trades' Council was only more than willing to help. 26 Moreover, this help passed beyond the passive support other trades councils offered into active support. For them, matters had come to a head when the local WSPU attempted to hold a protest meeting in the market place on a Friday evening in August 1913. As in other towns, the meeting attracted the local troublemakers and broke up in confusion and scuffles. Incensed by the lack of action taken by the police, the Trades' Council condemned in the highest terms their non-intervention at the outbreak of violence. 27 On the suggestion of Alderman Pitts, a letter of censure was written and sent to the local Watch Committee. In other towns this show of solidarity would have been enough, but the Trades' Council organised a second public meeting in the market in which they protested against the Cat and Mouse Act on behalf of the women. As one member, Mr. Roberts, said, 'The actions of these women is a lesson to trade unionists to show the same enthusiasm, self-sacrifice and endeavour.' 28

Arguably, their outlook and approach to the suffrage campaign either pointed to a high degree of self-responsibility that arose from a Liberal Nonconformity that dominated the town's politics, or it demonstrated a high level of dependency upon men and their political organisations. Either could have been true, as it is clear from newspaper reports many men, especially husbands of members, attended meetings in more than just an observer's role. Nevertheless, their feelings and actions were characteristic of an independency born out of wealth and privilege and they entirely reflected the norms and values of their Liberal circle. Indeed, many of the WSPU meetings around Northampton lacked the passion and militancy of either Leicester or Nottingham.

Yet they were not political novices. Instead, they were rounded, politically active women who would stand their ground in any political debate. Indeed, as the suffragette campaign entered into its final and most militant phase they steadfastly refused to take up arms against the Liberals and while they were, for the most part, happy to be associated with the WSPU, they vehemently refused to condone any militant action. This is interesting in itself and demonstrates a hitherto unknown factor that not all members of the WSPU were overwhelmed by the Pankhurst rhetoric. Nor were they expelled from the Union: indeed, quite the opposite appears to have been the case, as many national leaders arrived in Northampton to appeal to them directly and to keep them on board.

For many within the Northampton WSPU, it was in the spirit of reforming capitalism in order to improve an already 'good system' that many middle-class women participated in the suffrage struggle. Ultimately, they took the position that entirely reflected their upper-class, anti-working-class bias. Many honestly believed that once women had gained the vote they could rid the world of its wars, poverty and other social evils and, once middle-class women had the vote, they would have a duty to ensure legislation prevented the sexual and economic exploitation of working-class women. As Rosamund Billington suggested, the concern of some middle-class women for the rights of lower-class women was indeed a genuine one, although perhaps not always an active one.

Half-a-century ago, in the years immediately after the Second World War, Peterborough was a very different place from what it is now. It was much smaller then, both in area and population, and the city of that period still retained a flavour of much earlier commercial days. One illustration of this involved the question of water transport. At one time, Peterborough had been an important location for the barge-style traffic conducted by the Fenland lighters which traded along the River Nene, and through the Middle Level, leading to the River Great Ouse. In the 1930s, moreover, there had emerged the possibility of turning Peterborough into an inland port capable of handling seagoing ships of the smaller kind. A previous article\(^1\) by the present writer has dealt with the long and complicated story which underlay that particular development, involving large-scale engineering on the lower part of the Nene.

The Second World War, however, curtailed the process which had been intended to turn Peterborough into an inland port that could cope with such shipping as coasters of limited tonnage. Indeed, by the time that hostilities ended in 1945, commercial support for that particular concept was dwindling rapidly in the face of changing patterns within British transport as a whole. Nevertheless, the phrase 'Port of Peterborough' still had some popular appeal: this fact seems to have been at the back of Admiralty thinking when the decision was made to send Motor Torpedo-Boat 777 upon a decidedly unusual mission. A more immediate motive involved the idea of providing Peterborough's Sea Cadets with a floating headquarters likely to strike a chord in the imagination of youngsters who had leanings towards a career in the Royal Navy.

Motor Torpedo-Boat 777 was of the Fairmile D type. A Fairmile D measured just over 35 metres in length, and was of wooden construction.\(^2\) Wartime mass-production meant that craft of this sort were commonly built as a series of prefabricated units which were subsequently assembled at some convenient boatyard. This approach made it possible for such organisations as former furniture factories to play an important role in the process. It was an industrial concept of a sort which enjoyed quite a wide application in the period considered. Germany's Heinkel

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2. For brief comment on the Fairmile D type, see *Jane's Fighting Ships of World War II* (reprint of 1946-47 edition, Bracken Books, London 1989) p.73). NB the particular number 777 has been omitted in this reprint's listing.
162 jet-fighter of 1944-45, for instance, was produced by means of a similar system. Modifications, large and small, were seen on a number of Fairmile Ds. This fact, coupled with the effect of camouflage painting and the common use of tarpaulins to swathe certain items of equipment, means that considerable differences of appearance can be seen in various wartime photographs. However, typical armament for a Fairmile D included four torpedo-tubes, two 6-pounder guns, a pair of 20mm anti-aircraft guns (mounted together), and eight machine-guns of various calibres. A crew of around 30 was usual, and four Packard engines supplied a total of 5,000 bhp to drive the vessel along at a top speed of more than thirty knots, granted suitable sea-conditions. All in all, a Fairmile D could be considered as a diminutive but very versatile warship, packing a surprisingly heavy punch.

As originally conceived, motor torpedo-boats were viewed as having their chief merit in their torpedo-armament. A single hit by a torpedo could well prove disastrous for even a sizeable ship, and thus a diminutive torpedo-boat had the 'David' potential to destroy or cripple a 'Goliath' opponent. The Fairmile D type proved so effective, however, that it came to be employed in a whole range of roles, often relying on its various guns as its chief weapon. With surprisingly good sea-keeping abilities, combined with a relatively high turn of speed, a Fairmile D had much to recommend it for hazardous coastal operations. Inevitably, though, its small size and wooden construction made it very vulnerable to enemy counter-measures. The personnel who manned such craft tended to be of a daring disposition.

It is not always easy to establish the details of the operational career of some particular motor torpedo-boat, hurriedly constructed during the Second World War, and then launched into the hurly-burly of hostilities with (to put it mildly) a minimum of ceremony. In dealing with the wartime service of the 777, ‘Peterborough’s Warship’ as she became known in peacetime years, valuable co-operation took place a few years ago between the Fenland Lighter Project and two organisations which specialise in the provision of information of the sort required. Thus, particular thanks are due to G. M. Hudson of the Coastal Forces Veterans Association, and to Philip Simons of the British Armed Forces Small Craft Historical Research Group, for a highly informative summary.

Assembled during 1944 at Bangor, North Wales, the 777 proceeded to the Holyhead Coastal Forces Training Base. Commanded by Lieutenant N. A. Breeze DSC, RNVR, she began operations in the North Sea very early in 1945. There ensued a brief but strenuous period of service off the Belgian and Dutch coasts, resulting in damage which sent the 777 limping back to Yarmouth for repairs. By July 1945, i.e. just after the end of European hostilities, the 777 had become part of the Reserve Fleet. Later that same year she was earmarked for special service at Peterborough—service that would involve duties utterly different from her earlier ones.

Preparation of the vessel took place at Lowestoft. For service with the Peterborough Sea Cadets, neither main engines nor armament would be necessary, and so these were removed. With a small passage-crew on board, the 777 was then taken in tow by Motor Launch 264, another diminutive naval vessel of about the same length as the 777 herself. In due course, an informative article on the ensuing voyage appeared in the Peterborough Standard’s edition for 24th May 1946.

4. During the First World War, similar thinking had led to the high-speed torpedo-armed ‘Coastal Motor-Boats’ employed by the Royal Navy.
5. Some years ago a brief note, by the present writer, regarding the 777’s wartime career, appeared in the Journal of the Norfolk Wherry Trust, Autumn 1996 Number, pp.21-22. See also Fenland Lighter Project Select Papers, Peterborough Central Library (Local Studies Collections), folio 227.
6. For comment on the Motor Launch type, see footnote 2, p.73.
7. This front-page treatment in the Peterborough Standard of 24th May 1946 is of particular interest. There is internal evidence that this press material was prepared with the benefit of real seafaring knowledge, perhaps stemming from a Wisbech pilot.
Brief though this coastal-run was, it proved troublesome. The main engines had been removed but the propellers and their shafts were still in place: the wash of water caused rotation, of course, and somehow or another this led to undue friction involving the starboard shaft. A fire resulted but this was soon extinguished and very little damage was done. A more inconvenient problem resulted from deteriorating weather in the North Sea. For a time, this made it impossible to take on a Wisbech pilot for the first stage of the voyage up the Nene, and so the two little naval vessels had to lie in the Wash during an entire night and much of the subsequent day. Eventually, though, the weather eased and the 777 was successfully towed into the port of Wisbech.

So far so good. The 777 was now well up the Nene, but still 20 miles from Peterborough. The next stage of the tow, involving shallower water, required the services of a small civilian craft, one of the steam-tugs operated by the firm of A. V. Jackson (Peterborough) Ltd. Tugs of this sort normally towed ‘gangs’ of Fenland lighters, and the tug-crew were evidently tickled by the novel task of pulling a naval vessel through the Fenlands. To facilitate the 777’s passage under various bridges, her superstructure had been temporarily dismantled, but it was feared that the bridge at Guyhirn would nevertheless prove particularly troublesome. For such reasons, a contingent of naval seamen remained aboard. In the event, the Guyhirn hazard proved a tight squeeze, but the problem was negotiated without too much trouble. Once that matter was out of the way, the naval personnel were put ashore and returned to Wisbech by means of a lorry. The 777 then continued on her way and duly reached Peterborough early on the morning of Saturday 18th May – in heavy rain which kept away all but the most determined sightseers.

In due course, the Peterborough Standard presented its account of this event under the

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Figure 2: The bow of MTB 777 as she was manoeuvred into her berth at Peterborough

(Local Studies Collection, Peterborough Central Library)

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Figure 3: With superstructure dismantled, MTB 777 at Peterborough, just after her arrival

(Local Studies Collection, Peterborough Central Library)
headline ‘THE NAVY SAILS UP THE NENE’. A rather striking photograph of the new arrival, taken head-on, was given this caption: ‘MOTOR TORPEDO BOAT 777, loaned by the Admiralty to Peterborough Sea Cadet Corps, berthed on Saturday morning near the Town Bridge.’ Having described the events of the passage from Lowestoft, the accompanying article went on to give a lively word-picture of the 777 in her new environment. The bizarre spectacle of a somewhat battered naval vessel lying in the heart of an inland cathedral city was not lost on the journalist who wrote the piece. To be sure, she looked ‘rather gaunt’ with her superstructure dismantled, but moves were already afoot to improve her appearance. A general ‘clearing up on deck and below’ was in progress, coupled with a thorough repaint in the colour known as battleship-grey. This work was being carried out by ‘a swarm of cadets - and five ex-cadets on leave from the Navy.’

Although the main engines had been removed, the auxiliary generating-system was still available to provide lighting, and also to power the bilge-pumps. Internal lighting would be essential, of course, when the Peterborough public had an opportunity to come aboard so as to make itself better acquainted with the new addition to the community. Later on, the former engine-room would be converted into a classroom, and it was hoped (rather optimistically) that the 777 could then ‘give the cadets a complete course in seamanship’.

The Second World War had come to an end late in the preceding year, with the capitulation of the Japanese Empire. In Britain, Saturday 8th June 1946 was designated as Victory Day, and various celebrations and other functions became associated with that national event, general in character, and intended to mark the end of long and weary years of conflict right across the surface of the globe. In Peterborough, it was felt appropriate that the official handing-over ceremony involving the 777 should take place on Friday 7th June, i.e. the eve of Victory Day. Thus, the vessel was officially transferred to the Sea Cadets at a gathering which included many local notables and a scattering of naval officers. Curiously enough, the speeches made on that occasion indicate that nobody present had any knowledge of the details of the vessel’s wartime career. It was enough, though, that she had seen service with the Royal Navy; on that basis the warmest of welcomes was forthcoming. On the morrow, Victory Day itself, the Peterborough public paid the 777 a similar compliment: the press reported that ‘many people queued in the rain for long periods for a chance to go aboard.’

Initially, the mooring-place for the 777 involved a muddy and unattractive stretch of river-bank. However, fitted with a long gangway and extra handrails of curious construction, the vessel settled into her new role, and ‘Peterborough’s Warship’ became a familiar feature within the community. The year 1948 witnessed the ‘revival of Peterborough’s regattas, and the mayor for that year, Councillor E. V. Martin, publicly expressed the wish that the whole affair should be a ‘Naval occasion.’ The Sea Cadets figured prominently in the arrangements: it was reported in the local press that funds were needed ‘to improve the amenities of their headquarters’, and that it was hoped the eventual outcome would provide ‘a fitting approach to the new River Embankment.’

In describing what emerged as Peterborough Regatta Week – a whole range of entertainments and diversions had been added to the original concept – the Peterborough Citizen and Advertiser was at pains to emphasise that ‘thousands of people’ had been attracted to what had proved a great success. The Sea Cadets’ headquarters ashore, i.e. the Custom House, had of course been strikingly supplemented by its floating adjunct, the 777. As a further token of the Admiralty’s blessing on the proceedings, Rear-Admiral Sir Wellwood Maxwell had attended the festivities, making a speech which commended Peterborough’s inhabitants for their lively interest in the Royal Navy.

8. Peterborough Standard, 14th June 1946, front page.
9. Peterborough Citizen and Advertiser, 18th June 1948, p.5.
10. Peterborough Citizen and Advertiser, 22nd June 1948, front page. For further discussion of the social impact of these early post-war regattas at Peterborough, see H.J.K. Jenkins, Along the Nene (Cambridgeshire Books, 1991), pp.76-79.
Peterborough Regatta Week of 1949 witnessed the same sort of emphasis on naval matters. Glorious weather encouraged huge crowds to gather on the Town Bridge and along the riverside. Various races involving both sailing and rowing craft led on to prizes which were duly presented by Mrs. Rolfe, the wife of Commander Rolfe, Area Officer Sea Cadet Corps. Even the onset of darkness could not put a stop to the merriment, permeated as it was with constant reference to the Royal Navy and its proud traditions. Cheering crowds and a torchlight procession were the sequel to a somewhat fanciful parade along the Nene: this same parade involved small boats carrying crews dressed in what was supposed to be seafaring garb such as would have been seen on board British 'Peterborough's Warship': Motor Torpedo-Boat 777, 1946-51.
warships of various bygone periods. And, as a presiding influence over the whole Regatta Week, the 777 lay at her moorings, dwarfing everything else afloat in those waters. She was, though, a presiding influence that knew how to enter into the carnival spirit of the proceedings: indeed, there was particular comment in the press on the 777's role in hosting the boisterous fun-and-games that went with 'The Greasy Pole contest'.

By the early 1950s, it was becoming increasingly plain that the 777 was in need of considerable work on her structure. In all periods, there is a tendency for 'war-built tonnage' to deteriorate more quickly than vessels constructed in the less hurried days of peacetime. Certainly, the Admiralty became aware that it was going to prove a troublesome matter to keep 'Peterborough's Warship' in proper order. Accordingly, the decision was made that she must go. Thus, the 'Admiralty Small Craft Disposal List' of October 1951 referred to her in these terms: 

12. This 'Disposal List' appeared in various publications: see, for example, Motor Boat & Yachting, October 1951, p.73.
13. See Fenland Lighter Project Select Papers (as note 5), folio 227.
14. The Fenland Lighter Project is based at Peterborough. Website: http://www.gla.ac.uk/~aj12x/flp.html. E-mails: hjkpjjenkins@yahoo.co.uk
A Park Too Dear
Creating a Modern Deer Park

T. J. WATERFIELD

The labelling on some of the figures in Dr. Waterfield’s article about Norton Park which appeared in last year’s *Northamptonshire Past and Present* became garbled in the printing process. This is regretted, and for the record the figures in question are repeated in this issue in their correct form.

Figure 6: The plan of the proposed new Whilton road compared with the 1885 OS map
Figure 7: Proposed changes to the road to Weedon
(From NRO: QSR2/230-h)

Figure 8: Changes proposed for the footpath to Muscott
(From NRO: QSR2/236-d)

Figure 12: Daventry-to-Whilton Footway through Norton
(From NRO: QSR2/502-3)
Figure 15: Reconstruction of Roads and Fields as they might have appeared in 1828
The office of Churchwarden is still today one of considerable importance. The years covered by this volume tell of a parish in the Sutton Hundred in this other ‘kingdom’ of Northamptonshire beyond Brackley, during tumultuous years. Dissent – Civil War – Commonwealth and The Restoration. The twenty-two pages of the valuable introduction to the transcribed accounts appraises the role of churchwarden as keeper of the church purse and use has been made of archival material from neighbouring parishes for comparison.

As usual, the church warden is a commentator on both parochial and national events. As for expenditure, then, as now, the fabric of the church played a large part in the accounts. The warden was practised in extracting levies from the parishioners for repairs to the church (with the levy payer and the levy paid being recorded) and for the maintenance of its other assets, the houses which it owned. The letting of the church barn and meadows rented out for grass-keeping, provided a welcomed addition to his receipts.

Of great value to the local historian are the family names given for the tradesmen. The Whitakers being glaziers, the Upstones were plumbers, or as written ‘for ye ploming’! The younger members of the community were also kept occupied as it was recorded, ‘Payd to Nedeles boyes for 3 days worke for sarving the slattur’. As well as serving the slater on the roof with slates and nails, the three boys of the Needle family were also paid for catching sparrows or urchins (hedgehogs). It is not recorded if the slates were ‘Oxfordshire’slates, dug at Stonesfield?’

The care and attention given to the maintenance of the bells and tower points to the value placed on bells (the makers and dates for the bells are given). The clock which was often in repair was finally replaced in 1696. Details are also given for repairs to the spires and steeple in 1687. Beer for the workmen was a constant feature!

The editor highlights the major expense of bread and wine for the Communion and speculates that a communicant must have partaken of a ‘glassful’ rather than the modern custom of ‘a sip’. At a time of unusual prosperity in 1650, with money to spare, the wardens acted as bankers lending money on bond!

In 1687 King’s Sutton rang a Peal of Bells in Thanksgiving for the Queen, Mary of Modena, being with child. This child was to be James, the only surviving son of James II, the 13th Prince of Wales, known as the Old Chevalier, father of Bonny Prince Charlie, and step sibling to the two Queens, Mary II and Anne, daughters of Queen Anne Hyde.

With regard to the question of whether there was an interregnum between 1651 and 1655 there appears to be some degree of confusion with the Creeke family of clerics. John Creeke the elder was formerly vicar of King’s Sutton before his rectorship of Bramshall, Staffordshire where he died and was buried in May 1652. Surely it was his widow, Joan whose burial was recorded in the King’s Sutton Register in July 1652, when of course she could well be described as wife of the late vicar of King’s Sutton. John the younger’s sixth son, Jonathan, was baptised there in June 1653 and so an interregnum was unlikely.*

The effect on the parish from national matters was instanced by damage caused by soldiers during the civil war. Doctrinal matters the bickerings between the popish and dissenters continually affected the placement of furnishings in the church with the communion table sometimes called an altar, and re-positioning of the table from the nave to the east end and back and forth. When Cromwell tried to discontinue old Christian Festivals, the parish held fast to its Great Easter Festival.
I had looked in vain to Anne Elizabeth Baker's *Northamptonshire Glossary* for the derivation of the word 'youllming' (which we are told means thatching): she does feature in this book for the illustration used on the cover, W.S. Wilkinson's engraving of the Church from the West End, is taken from a sketch she did for her brother, George Baker's *History of the County*, and is recorded 'as by A.E.B.'

*H. I. Longden in his great work *Northamptonshire and Rutland Clergy*, vol. 3, 1938, records the families and careers of both father and son.

Rosemary Eady

**A GUIDE TO THE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE OF NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**

Compiled by the Northamptonshire Industrial Archaeology Group with support from the Northamptonshire County Council, 2001

John Stanley Publishers, 7 Elysium Terrace, Northampton NN2 6EN
ISBN 0-9541132-0-9
A5, 100 pp., paperback
Price £4.95

It is about forty or fifty years or so that Industrial Archaeology emerged as a subject (even though pukka archaeologists were snotty about the word 'archaeology' for quite some time). Although its first practitioners were historians and museum people, it became a way for engineers, grown-up trainspotters and others with an interest in early technology, never much attracted by conventional history, to approach and do economic and technological history. As with many new disciplines, it developed and eventually entered the mainstream under a number of influences, perhaps the main one being University Adult Education.

Early in my days at the University Centre in Northampton I was looking around for a local expert to run an Industrial Archaeology course in our programme and came across the name of Geoffrey Starmer. Together we organised a course in which some of the leading figures, indeed founding fathers, of Industrial Archaeology came and gave lectures on their work. This was the first in a series, and eventually some of the students and local practitioners formed themselves into the Northamptonshire Industrial Archaeology Group (NIAG) which has carried the work forward ever since. I think it is fair so say that its leading light and driving force was, and still is, Geoff Starmer. This book has been compiled by him, Peter Perkins and Roy Sheffield.

And a fine job they have done. A hundred pages, nicely produced, easy to use, it fits nicely into the jacket pocket. Industrial Archaeology has meanwhile become Industrial Heritage, the sexiest word in the politicians' vocabulary, which abhors user-friendly words such as 'history' or 'archaeology'. If that is what it takes to get them to shell-out, so be it. To the untutored, Northamptonshire is still largely a rural county; not, on the face of it, one of the places to look for 'the Industrial Revolution'. One of the fascinating things, shown well by this book, is that the scope of the subject has widened, and that evidence of early technology can be found in villages as well as towns. And of course, the county did have, and in some cases still hangs on to, extractive industries, footwear, engineering, brewing, windmills, canals and railways. With a brief introduction, the book is in the form of a gazetteer, starting with Achurch (with its water pump), to Yelvertoft (which has a nice example of how canals follow contours). Most places appear, though for Kettering and Northampton, only a sample of their riches is listed. But the selection is very good. It is concise and informative, with a photograph on every page. Look as I will, my only criticism is the nit-picking one that the clothing factories in Kettering and Brigstock
belonged to the firm of Wallis & Linnell, rather than just Wallis. It is a very welcome book which should be on the shelves of every student of Northamptonshire’s past. It has already proved popular, and no wonder, at £4.95 it is a bargain.

R. L. Greenall

A POOR BUT INDUSTRIOUS PEOPLE
Memories of Brafield on the Green
Richard Hollowell, edited by Steven Hollowell
Merton Priory Press
ISBN 1 898937 52 4
18 x 25cm, hardback 156pp
Price reduced (for a limited period only) to £18.95

As the subtitle suggests, this book tells of memories of life in a Northamptonshire village. It is not a village history, but the memories of one man’s life; of those to whom he was related and others amongst whom he lived.

Born in 1916, fourth in a family of five children, to a father who nearly died in the terrible influenza epidemic which struck shortly after the end of the First World War, life for Dick and his family was, of necessity, frugal. Not that they were unique in this; most of the villagers found life equally difficult. It was largely due to the mutual help of families and friends that most were able to survive.

Hazy early memories of boyish pranks and running errands to earn pennies to help the family economy are followed by tales of school life and helping on local farms. Numerous aspects of village life and village characters are recounted.

Leaving school at 14, with no clear ideas of how to earn a living, Dick found his first job in Mansfield’s shoe factory. A downturn in trade within a few months soon brought this to an end and a succession of other jobs followed, some lasting a year or two, some a day or two.

Despite these problems, he harvested his resources, to such an extent that, in 1938, he was able to pay 37 pounds, 10 shillings to acquire a Ford 8 car, at a time when few villagers possessed such a thing. With this, he and two friends set off to the Empire Exhibition, in Glasgow, a journey which took two days. Camping in farmer’s fields, they also visited Loch Lomond, the Lake District and the seaside at Morecambe; all in one week!

At about this time, the idea of developing his experience as a self-sufficient allotment gardener into a business as a Market Gardener came to him. The recently purchased car, with the addition of a trailer, enabled him to get the produce to market. With the inevitable ups and downs of such a business, this continued to support him, his wife and children until a stroke at the age of 76 forced him to adopt a less active life style.

Dick Hollowell is a name known to all who are interested in archaeology in this county. His interest was aroused when, in 1951, he was preparing a piece of ground to erect a war-surplus building which he had purchased at auction for £1.00. When some bones appeared, he was convinced they were human, despite the scepticism of his companions. When he also found a metallic object, he was curious enough to take his discoveries to Northampton Museum, where they were identified as Roman. Now fascinated, he began to explore his own ground, then surrounding areas, eventually covering the whole of the Upper Nene valley.

Dick’s illness, and the later years of his life are described by his son, Steven, to whom we are indebted for bringing this book to publication. The book is well illustrated and includes 16 colour plates, most taken from hand-coloured lantern slides of farming and village scenes in the early 1920s.

Dick’s chief publication was the 1971 Bulletin of the Northamptonshire Federation of Archaeological Societies, Aerial Photography and Fieldwork in the Upper Nene Valley, edited by A.E.
Brown. It is wholly devoted to his work and lists no fewer that 254 sites in Northamptonshire, plus 12 in adjoining counties, accompanied by 42 aerial photographs.

Mike Rumbold

SHORTER NOTICES

Another in the burgeoning list of Millennium Project parish books is Rita Poxon’s *Glimpses of Gayton: a pictorial history of a Northamptonshire village* which is unashamedly more pictorial than historical (published by Sue Clayton, Japonica House, Flintham, Newark, Notts NG23 5LA, ISBN 0 9533350 1 1, softback, 21 by 25 cm). In its 178 pages there are over 250 photographs and drawings and a few maps, not all of which have reproduced well. But it will please both resident and old Gaytonians immensely; most of the photos being Victorian or twentieth century. Where it is not so valuable is in the area of wider usefulness. Ms. Poxon has done her stuff in the County Record Office, but there is not much on the pre-1700 period. By page 15 we have arrived at ‘Arthur Roberts’ Bus’, with ‘Life Near the Canal’ and ‘Enter the Railway’ coming shortly after. The sort of questions that historians ask of rural life – is it a closed parish or an open parish or something between? – are not put. But no matter. This is this particular village in the last 150 years captured. Gaytonians will appreciate Ms. Poxon’s handsome book.

R. L. Greenall

**ALL SAINTS’ CHURCH, EARLS BARTON – A brief history and guide**  
*by Andrew Hart*  
ISBN 0 953 1218 0 1  
All Saints’ Church 1997

*Reprint with minor amendments, 2001, 28pp., illustrated.*  
*Price £2.00 from the Church, or £2.50 incl. p&p from C. A. Hart, 14 Keats Close, Earls Barton, Northampton NN6 0PR. Cheques payable to All Saints’ Church*

This attractive A5 booklet with a coloured cover stands out among church guides, as a very thorough account of the architectural history. It begins with a detailed plan by D.F. Goodger giving a key to the architectural styles and location of church furniture and other items of interest. The account discusses the early history of the site and whether the internationally famous late-Saxon tower originally had secular functions as well as religious ones, and what was its relationship to the adjacent motte-type earthwork? Whatever the answers to these questions are, it is clear that the tower was the visual centrepiece for a considerable sized Saxon estate held by the thegn Bondi in 1066, who also held Barnack, where there is a similar ornate tower.

Although well known and important, the tower is not the only feature that demands attention – the medieval building has many other interesting items. The book discusses the architectural additions and changes in detail. These include a fine Norman south doorway, an Early English chancel window and a 15th-century clerestory. Among the furnishings are a 15th-century screen, a monumental brass to John Muscote (died 1512) and a Jacobean pulpit as well as more recent items. All are fully described and many illustrated with good quality photographs. References and a bibliography are supplied and Mr. Hart is to be congratulated for providing such an excellent guide.

David Hall
TWELVE GENERATIONS. GLEANINGS FROM THE COALES FAMILY ARCHIVES

compiled by John Coales

(Francis Coales Charitable Foundation, 2000)

ISBN 0 9510076 1 0

Price £50 plus p&p £6

In the account of this book published in NPP 2001, the details of price and where to obtain the volume were omitted. Copies are obtainable from the Francis Coales Charitable Foundation, The Mount, Somerton, Somerset, TA11 7PF.
On 28th February, 2002, Northamptonshire lost one of its best-loved and devoted sons when George Freeston of Blisworth died at the age of 90. For most of his life, George was the ‘recording angel’ of Blisworth. Not much happened in the village of which he was not aware and which he did not chronicle in some way.

Frederick George Freeston was born on 19th November 1911, the last son of five boys and one girl of Edwin Thomas and Eliza Freeston. The family came to Blisworth from Hounslow. George was the only child born in Blisworth and was the first baby of the new doctor, Dr. Jeaffreson. Edwin Thomas was the village wheelwright, undertaker and ladder-maker during the winter months. With the advent of so many sons, the business remained in the family and evolved into a car repair and taxi firm. George took on the last of these roles, not being mechanically inclined. This allowed him to indulge his delight in observing people and develop a rich fund of stories about the village and its people.

During the Second World War, George served as a corporal in the RAF in the Netherlands and Belgium and followed the D-Day troops into France. When asked by George’s nephew what it was like working on loading bombers with George, his officer, Les, said ‘very dangerous!’

When Blisworth tunnel was being constructed, George was on site every day to see what was going on. One day he was let down in a basket into an air tunnel. He did many lectures using slides made from these visits. He possibly knew more than the contractors about the construction of the tunnel. When the bypass of Blisworth was being built, George was there every day to see what had been discovered, often carrying whatever it was home to adorn his already full
cottage and garden. Inside the cottage, the walls of one room were covered with shelves laden with boxes containing everything and more that there was to know about Blisworth and its people. Some years ago, George staged an exhibition in the church which lasted for a week and drew in the crowds, eager to see what he had collected about the village. His contacts were far-flung and he received frequent requests for information about Blisworth people from their descendants all over the world. A lot of them visited him and were warmly received and educated.

In 1952, George put together a startlingly beautiful and comprehensive scrapbook on Blisworth for the competition being held that year and won first prize. Written in his distinctive handwriting, it is a true work of art. Another event which gave George great pleasure occurred in 1998, when he was made an Honorary Fellow of University College Northampton, three days after his 87th birthday.

George was a member of the Northamptonshire Record Society for 46 years and in 2000 was made an Honorary Member in recognition of his services.

Blisworth church was full to overflowing for his funeral. Dr. Derek Bull brought George’s life to a fitting close with a talk full of humour and love. George is sorely missed.

Barbara Hornby
GEORGE AND TONY REMEMBERED

Two notable Northamptonshire men, George Freeston and Tony Ireson, died, full of years, within days of one another this February (2002). Both were singularly devoted to their native places, George to Blisworth and Tony to Kettering, and to their county. Knowing them only in the last third or so of their lives, this memoir may not do full justice to them, though both loved to recount stories of their early days. In the course of researching and teaching local history in Northamptonshire in the last 30 years I had occasion to visit them on many occasions and our paths always seemed to be crossing. Although very different, they had at least one thing in common: a love of Post Office First Day Covers. As I write, in front of me is a first day cover postcard from George of Peter Newcombe’s design for the 13p stamp, ‘Snowdrops’, in the series on ‘British Flowers’, commissioned by the Post Office in 1979. From Tony there is an envelope from 1975 commemorating the bicentenary of Jane Austen’s birth.

The late J. L. Carr used to say that George’s home in Blisworth was the most interesting house in Northamptonshire. It was full of village memorabilia, and antiques to make the most discerning collector take notice. George was not a rich man but he had what an Antiques Roadshow expert would call ‘a good eye’, acquiring many of his pieces cheaply long before a wider interest in them developed. One thinks of such Staffordshire figures as Tippoo Sultan’s Tiger and Garibaldi dismounted by his white charger. George was no aesthete; he was more interested in the historical context of his collection than its financial value. In that distinctive voice of his he was just as ready to enthuse about a Victorian rat-trap or some obscure kitchen utensil as a figurine. On his walls, alongside old handbills, plates and plaques were George Clarke of Scaldwell drawings and one or two early pieces by Peter Newcome.

The youngest of the five sons of a wheelwright, who moved to Blisworth just before George was born in 1911, he and three of his brothers ran the village garage. George drove the taxi and had a fund of taxidriver’s stories of passengers in the back. He particularly enjoyed driving certain well-to-do ladies to London and, while they were shopping, took advantage of London’s free educational system provided in the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Museum and the National Gallery. In the Second World War he served in the R.A.F., rising to the rank of Sergeant Armourer. George enjoyed his war, reminiscing how he often managed to locate wine in the cellars of houses in which he and his comrades were spending the night. There was always something of the superannuated roisterer in George.

Like so many who survived the war, George took a deep satisfaction in returning to his roots. For many years he was secretary to the Blisworth Parochial Church Council, and anyone reading his minutes will find them quite unlike those of any similar body. Through contact with Miss Wake he became involved in local history, serving for a number of years as honorary secretary of the Northamptonshire Local History Committee, which is where I first met him. As well as encouraging research, Miss Wake urged people to record what was happening in the present. This was George’s forte. Loving every brick and stone, alley and drain in the place, he became Blisworth’s remembrancer. Through knowing everyone there he gathered in photographs, bits of iron and wood, stones, local bricks, Friendly Society regalia and documentary records of all kinds. He loved getting into inaccessible corners, such as the church roof, where he took rubbings of the footprints, dates and initials of those who had repaired the leads since the 18th century. Perhaps his biggest single project was the recording, on a day-to-day basis, of the reconstruction of the Bliswoth canal tunnel. The latter-day navvies, living in their caravans, eating gargantuan mid-morning breakfasts, fascinated him, and he recorded their work in words and photographs. He loved to mount his collections for display, to the delight of those who visited his exhibitions. George was not a writer, but a raconteur, and great fun to be with. And not only was he fun, he was extremely informative and was in demand as a speaker. Above all, he was a great compiler, winning the village scrapbook competition organised by the Women’s Institute in 1952 with his Book of Blisworth. In his latter years, realising the need to do so, he began captioning his collection and depositing it in the Record Office, though whether he was able to...
complete this huge task I seriously doubt. But, thanks to him, any future historian of 20th century rural life will find the Freeston of Blisworth collection unusually full and informative. In Byron Rogers, a Welsh journalist settled in Northamptonshire, he found a Boswell. Mr. Rogers wrote several pieces on George. The selection of Mr. Rogers’ articles, recently published under the title *An audience with an Elephant* (Aurum Press, 2001), contains ‘Last of England’s Village Voices’, one of the best of his Freeston essays.

If George was ‘Mr. Blisworth’, Tony Ireson was ‘Mr. Kettering’. Born there (in 1913) and educated at the Grammar School, apart from his war service, he spent his life in the town, never being tempted to leave. From 1929 to 1958 he was a journalist with the *Evening Telegraph*, and after that edited the magazine *Gardening News*. There must be many, like me, who were first introduced to Northamptonshire through his book on the county published in 1954 and reprinted several times. I came into contact with him in the early 1970s when I joined the Council of the Record Society, of which by then he had been a member for some time, and on a closer basis when I was persuaded to teach a local history course in Kettering. At the start I did not realise that such people as Tony, Fred Moore and Frank Thompson, all in their way local experts were there to see what this total stranger had to tell them about their town, after only a mere summer’s work in the archives and libraries. Such courses can go very well, provided the tutor is not foolish enough to pretend to have more local knowledge than he actually has, and shows commitment. A sort of contract develops, the tutor bringing material from the archives for the group to discuss, and people responding by bringing in items from their collections. That course was the first of several over the ensuing years and started a continuing interest in Kettering on my part.

Tony Ireson in conversation with Stephen House (Valerie Finnis)
As a trained journalist, Tony was used to researching his stories with speed and accuracy, and often pulled my leg about the historian's obsession with deep quarrying for material which in the end sometimes produced little more than his methods. And in this he was only partly wrong. He was also intrigued why I, with no local roots, kept doing this. We both used to enjoy recollecting the time when, after teaching a course on Kettering in the 19th century, I foolishly agreed to follow it with a short one on Kettering in the Great War. Pressed for time for the necessary research, in the end I had to run journalist, arriving in Kettering Library to grub through the local papers for 1914 to 1918 all day, putting the notes into some sort of order and using them to teach that evening. Tony would often pop into the library and always remembered the ‘conversation free’ zone I placed around myself in order not to be distracted. How it amused him to see me scribbling furiously. Needless to say, I never repeated that particular exercise ever again.

Almost certainly what Tony will be remembered best for in Kettering were his battles against ‘urban renewal’, which involved far too much destruction of old Kettering at the hands of the local council and their planners for his, and many other people’s, taste. The struggles began with the demolition of the Victorian Grammar School building in 1958, the first step in what became a major redevelopment of Gold Street and a large site behind. Tony was a founder member of the Kettering Civic Society which fought the plans to demolish many of the buildings that gave Kettering so much of its character. A sub-plot developed around Tony’s personal battle to save his own home, Beech Cottage, in Tanner’s Lane, earmarked for demolition to make way for an access road to a car park. Beech Cottage had been his home since 1947 and he remained there after his wife’s death in 1961. In 1975 he won his long battle with the town planners who tried to get him out with compulsory purchase orders. He had noticed from the plans that the destruction of his house was not strictly necessary for entry to the car park. His lawyers made the most of this and he and they won the day, and he continued to live in Beech Cottage until his death. There was something very Kettering in his cussedness and stamina in fighting for his rights, and there was also a rogish pleasure in it as well. His victory was, of course, pyrrhic: he lost all but two feet of his 72 foot front garden to the planners, and the view from his window was of the rear of a shopping centre, not one of the 20th century’s more pleasing aesthetic experiences. Tony was paid a true and touching tribute by the editor of *Country Life*: ‘Mr. Ireson is the sort of man that every town should have – he is the keeper of the flame.’

As well a battling to save the best of old Kettering, Tony continued to write, sitting at his ancient typewriter daily. And what he produced was something quite remarkable. In addition to articles for this and other publications, he wrote his account of the town’s urban renewal battle in *Old Kettering and its Defenders*. In 1988 there followed the publication of *Old Kettering – A View from the 1930s*. This started a process which, if it was now on television, would be called a ‘viewer participation’, only in this case the ‘viewers’ who provided feedback were his readers. Right at the start he asserted that ‘in the 1930s Kettering ran its own affairs with confidence and ability. Everything that could be local was local, and proud of it.’ Nowadays business, government and most sectors of life are controlled from afar. He set out to record Kettering as it used to be before modernity began to alter things, in his view, for the worse. Thereafter, at roughly two-year intervals, sequels appeared, beginning with *Old Kettering – A View from the 1930s. Book 2*. Another four were printed, funded by the author (who always covered his costs selling them locally): at the time of Tony’s death a seventh was approaching completion. The remarkable thing was that each one carried chapters on new topics, alongside which was material additional to what he had written in preceding books, provided by readers whose contribution Tony always acknowledged. It presents a remarkable picture of a writer including his readers in an almost inexhaustible process of evoking Kettering Past. To me it also looks like proof that the world whose loss he fulminated against still exists, at least in the minds of that generation old enough to remember Kettering in the Thirties.

R. L. Greenall
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THE NORTHAMPTONSHIRE RECORD SOCIETY

The Northamptonshire Record Society was founded in 1920 and its main aims were:

i. The publication of manuscripts
ii. To arrange lectures
iii. To accumulate manuscripts

At the outset, the collection of records, many of which would have been lost, was very important but it became an immense task for a Society funded by subscriptions and grants only. Consequently, in 1952, this part of the work was transferred to the Northamptonshire Record Office which, since 1974, has been part of the County Council.

With 1,000 members, the Society is probably one of the most prestigious of its kind in the country. There are members from many parts of the world, including academic institutions in Europe, America, Canada and Australia. We enjoy the membership of distinguished historians and members of Northamptonshire families as well as others with a general interest of history.

The benefits of membership are free entry to lectures held twice yearly (usually May and October); a free copy of the Society's annual journal, *Northamptonshire Past and Present*; and a free copy of a hard-backed volume of an historical text, approximately every two years. There is also access to the Society's library at Wootton Hall Park. Members may use the library to study and borrow up to six books at one time. The subscriptions help the Society to publish editions of documents which, due to language or location, may be otherwise inaccessible to all but the specialist.

The current subscription rate for ordinary members is £15.00 per annum. For further information please contact the Secretary at the Northampton Office, Wootton Hall Park, Northampton, NN4 8BQ.
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