NOTES AND NEWS

This number of *Northamptonshire Past and Present* starts the second Volume of our Journal. The index to the first six numbers (Volume I), most kindly made by Miss Sylvia Riches, one of our members, is now on sale, price 2/- post free, and is obtainable from the Hon. Secretary of the Society. Some sets of Volume I, bound in red cloth complete with index (price 30s.), will be ready before the end of the year. Those wishing to have their own sets bound can do so for 6s. 6d. a set, by sending the sets to Messrs. Birdsell & Son, Bookbinders, Northampton, who will also supply cases at 4s. each to those wishing to have their sets bound elsewhere, as may well be the case with our overseas readers. Carriage will be extra.

It is with great regret that we have to tell our readers of the untimely death on April 25th, 1954, of Mr. Charles Burton of Northampton, the Honorary Treasurer of our Society for fourteen years. He was a wise, kind, and dependable friend, and the Society benefited greatly from the time and attention which he devoted to its affairs. Mr. Charles Mumby has since been appointed to succeed him, with Miss G. M. Hewitt as Honorary Assistant Treasurer.

The Annual Meeting on June 26th was held again at Lamport Hall, by kind invitation of Sir Gyles Isham. It was a great day. The audience overflowed from the lecture room into the library and up the staircase to the first floor, but a wireless relay had been provided and everybody was able to enjoy Sir Arthur Bryant's delightful address on Samuel Pepys. The exhibition of documents of Pepysian interest kindly arranged by the staff of the Northamptonshire Record Office was also a great attraction. The weather was kind and we were very happy to have our President and Lady Exeter with us again.

The excellent work carried on at the Northamptonshire Record Office at Lamport Hall in the year ended March 31st, 1954, is briefly described in the *Report of the Northamptonshire Archives Committee*. The outstanding event of the year was the deposit of the records relating to the former Northamptonshire estates of the Egerton family, which included the Borough of Brackley. The Record Society had been searching unsuccessfully for many years for the records of this Borough, which were lying in the office of a London solicitor. Now they have come to light and by the public spirit of the owner are available for students. Sixty students did research at Lamport during the twelve months covered by the Report, and a Summary Guide to the contents of the Record Office is in preparation. This will be very valuable to historians.

PUBLICATIONS. We are glad to say that Volume XVI of our publications, *The Book of William Morton*, was published in November and that Volume XVII, *The Correspondence of Bishop Brian Dappa and Sir Justinian Isham, 1650-1660*, will shortly be in the hands of members. (See pp. iii, 47, 48 below). The volume for 1954-55 will be a study in economic history by Dr. M. E. Finch, entitled : "The Wealth of Five Northamptonshire Families, 1540-1640." The families dealt with are the Ishams of Lamport, the Spencers of Althorp, the Treshams of Rushton, the Fitzwilliams of Milton, and the Brudenells of Deene.

ANCIENT BUILDINGS. The Record Society has always felt a special concern for the ancient buildings of Northamptonshire—for their beauty; their historical associations; and their value, only recently coming to be recognised, as historical evidence. We are pleased, therefore, to be able to give some good news about *Stoke Bruerne Park* (built to designs brought from Italy by Sir Francis Crane in the reign of Charles I), which was in danger of becoming a ruin, and of which we gave an illustration in the last number of this Journal. It has since been bought by Mr. R. D. Chancellor who is repairing the original parts of the house which survived the fire of 1886, with the aid of a grant from the Historic Buildings Council. We are glad to hear that he intends to make Stoke Park his home.

DELAPRE ABBEY. Northampton Corporation, on the grounds of economy, decided last April to pull down Delapre Abbey. As it is a fine old house architecturally, is close to Northampton and could be put to such excellent use in housing the records of the County and as a most suitable and accessible centre for historical research, the Society feels that its demolition would be a grave mistake, and sent a Resolution to the above effect to the Town Council. We are now able to state that at the suggestion of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, conferences between the Local Authorities concerned as to the possibility of
preserving the Abbey for this purpose have been resumed. May the outcome of their deliberations be altogether successful. A Folk Museum, a Northamptonshire Portrait Gallery, and a convenient centre for lectures and educational conferences are other cultural uses which occur to one to which Delapre might be put with great advantage to everybody.

RUSHTON HALL. The County is also in danger of losing this magnificent specimen of 16th and 17th century architecture in the Rockingham Forest area—perhaps the finest of all our “stately homes” now that Kirby Hall is a ruin. It is devoutly to be hoped, even at this late hour, that some means will be found of preserving this historic house, of which we give an illustration in this number.

Rushton was the home of the Treshams for three centuries. Two of them were Speakers of the House of Commons in the Middle Ages. Sir Thomas was a great builder and Rothwell market-house, the Triangular Lodge at Rushton, and Liveden New Build are his handy-work. For an account of his unfortunate son, Francis, the reader is referred to the article on page 31.

LINKS WITH AMERICA. This Society has many friends and supporters in America, including Mr. Thomas Robins of New York, whose membership dates from 1938. Mr. Robins’s forbears lived at Long Buckby and the Buckby records of the 16th and 17th century are peppered with his name. For thirty years he has been diligently tracking his ancestors back generation by generation well beyond 1620, the year when the family acted upon their great decision to leave England and emigrate to America. But he could never identify the piece of England which they owned. This summer, though well over eighty years of age Mr. Robins came back to England after a long interval for another attempt, and it is with great pleasure that we record that with the most efficient help of Miss D. L. Powell, and by the use of the ancient documents at Lamport, he was at last successful, and was able to his great satisfaction as he said: to “stamp his foot upon the ground” owned and tilled over three centuries ago by those of his name and blood. Mr. Robins was staying at Brockhall with his friends Colonel and Mrs. Thornton when this great discovery was made. The two families had been intimate friends in the 17th century.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. We desire to thank those kind persons who have lent photographs for our illustrations, namely: Miss M. E. Elkins (the Yelvertoft shepherd); Mrs. Sturgess and Mr. George Freeston (the Grafton gamekeeper); the National Buildings Record (house at Benefield). The fine photograph of Rushton Hall inside our back cover was specially taken by Miss Helga Tye of the Northants Evening Telegraph, and to the same paper we are indebted for the loan of the block of the old engraving of Rushton on page 36. The Cosgrove weather-cock was photographed for us by Mr. T. Brown of Wolverton.

The photograph of Fotheringay Church on our front cover was taken by Mr. Paul Taylor of Kettering, and is reproduced from a block kindly lent by Mrs. Squire, College Farm Guest House, Fotheringay, Peterborough. This very beautiful church is in need of repair, for which contributions will be gratefully received by Mrs. Squire who also has postcards for sale bearing the same view as that on our cover.

We are grateful to members for returning N.R.S. volumes not required by them. These are often a great boon to students.

THE FUTURE. The difficulties of Learned Societies caused by continually rising costs of printing, paper, postage, etc., do not grow less as the years go on. That so far we have been able to weather the storm, is due to the generous support of our members, contributors, editors, and the firms who advertise in this Journal, to whom, once more, we express our very sincere thanks. Some Societies talk of raising subscriptions, but we are convinced that the real solution is to widen the membership. We therefore extend to our readers and especially to those in Northamptonshire who are still outside the fold, a warm invitation to help us to maintain and extend our work by becoming members of the Society.

The motto on our cover is from The Epistle Dedicatory to Hydriotaphia: Urn Burial (1651) by Sir Thomas Browne.
It is now over ten years since the death after a street accident of Miss Ethel Stokes. A full-length memoir of this remarkable woman must one day be written, but it is high time that something should be added to the notices in the papers at the time of her death. It is perhaps appropriate that this brief and most inadequate tribute should appear in the Journal of the Society of which she was a member; which represents the cause to which she devoted the last fourteen years of her life; and which is connected with the County in which, at Sulgrave Mill, she spent many happy holidays in her later years.

Ethel Stokes was the prime mover, the chief instigator, in the truest sense the real founder of the biggest movement for English history since the passing of the Public Record Office Act of 1838. And the task that she set herself was in many respects far more arduous than that which faced the handful of eminent people who had dealt so successfully with the central records of the Kingdom. But in her own right as an individual Miss Stokes deserves to be put on record. The problem is how to convey to those who did not know her the real flavour of the personality housed in that sturdy, plainly dressed figure, a personality so strong and vigorous, so able and intelligent, so modest and unassuming, of such single-minded integrity, such self-command, hiding under that business-like and almost brusque manner a sensitive nature, a delicious sense of fun, and a most affectionate heart. A person, moreover, of many different activities, carried on almost in secrecy from each other; who lived her life as it were in water-tight compartments, and who had many groups of friends totally unknown to each other. On the day of her funeral who was not astonished at the large congregation which filled the chapel at Golders Green, of people who had come up from far and near in the most trying period of the bombing to pay to her their last tribute of affection and respect?
Miss Stokes was born in London on January 17th, 1870, and was all her life a loyal Londoner. She was educated at Notting Hill High School in its great days under the headmistress-ship of Miss H. M. Jones. She took honours in English literature in the Higher Local Examination on leaving school and had at that time a great ambition to write poetry, but the more she read of the lives of great writers, of their egotism and selfishness and the trouble they gave to other people, the more they disgusted her, and so, as she told me, she gave up the idea. From the age of twelve she had been allowed to read any book she liked, and her father, whom she loved, gave her more than the usual freedom in other ways. She was allowed in her teens to wander all over London by herself, her father only stipulating that she should have a good square mid-day meal, for which he would provide her with half-a-crown before she set off. She had one brother, younger than herself, and the family lived in those days in Euston Square.

Family circumstances prevented her from going to the University and she started straight from school to earn her living as a record agent, doing much of her early work on parish registers. In 1891 she began to work at the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane where she was to remain a familiar, but to other searchers a somewhat aloof and slightly awe-inspiring figure for the next fifty-three years. The evidence which she gave before the Royal Commission on the Public Records in 1911 and 1913 shows that by then her searches for her clients had already taken her all over the country to record repositories of many kinds—probate registries, parish chests, ecclesiastical, municipal, and private collections—as well as to the British Museum and Somerset House, while she had gained such an extensive knowledge of the contents of the Public Record Office itself as to put her in the very forefront of her profession. Many other record agents were by then in the field and throughout her life she remained on the friendliest terms with them all. With one of them, indeed, she formed a friendship and business partnership which was broken only by death after more than thirty years.

At the top of Chancery Lane on the left-hand side going north there is a door numbered 75, where just inside there used to be a plate: “STOKES & COX.” Miss Mary Cox was the daughter of Edward Hanslope Cox, law stationer and one-time Master of the Worshipful Company of Stationers. He came from Hanslope in north Bucks where his ancestors had lived for generations. The famous family of statuaries, the Coxes of Northampton and Daventry, of whom an account by Miss Shelagh Lewis appeared in the 1953 number of this Journal, were of the same family. After climbing a truly formidable number of stairs one arrived gasping at the very top of the building facing a door inscribed in huge letters: “GEORGE BROWN, PRIVATE DETECTIVE.” On the other side of the door was the office of Stokes and Cox, the place where they lived and worked for ten or twelve hours a day when not at some record repository (for as Miss Stokes told me, otherwise they only kept “a couple of bedrooms in Highgate”). The office was furnished with heavy Victorian furniture and a huge oil-painting of Miss Cox. Books and papers were stacked here and there in orderly piles, and across a deep recess hung a heavy balse curtain, behind which was a gas ring. Here Miss Cox would prepare the food which enabled Miss Stokes to pursue her herculean labours, for the partners regarded themselves as one individual and had worked out a most scientific division of labour, Cox doing the necessary chores and such charitable work as they felt were due from each to the community, besides taking a
minor share in the record business, which left Stokes free to devote her first-class brain and prodigious powers of concentration to her professional work.

As long (or one might say, as short) a time as the Record Office was open, i.e. from 10.0 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., with a brief interval for luncheon, Stokes could have been seen on most days of the week at her seat near the far end of the Legal Room, copying with incredible swiftness and accuracy in her beautiful hand-writing—a hand which never changed from her schooldays to the day of her death—her extracts for her clients from the ancient charters and records of the realm. Ejected at 4.30 she would return to No. 75, and do several more hours in that lofty retreat. But what about the detective whose name was on the door? My inquiries were met with evasive chuckles till at last it was revealed that one day Miss Cox’s bag had been stolen, and that this was the ingenious means they had adopted of protecting their property.

In spite of her concentration on her work, Miss Stokes had other interests than records. She enjoyed a good play, for example. She is known to have once taken part in a Suffragette procession, but on this subject she had changed her views. In 1895 she wrote an article in one of the weekly reviews poking fun at the women who were agitating for the vote, saying that they talked a lot about their rights but little about their duties and that men who were prepared to defend their country had the right to govern it. She had no end of answers from women of all classes, some of them kitchenmaids, who were desirous of training to defend their country. So she summoned them together and formed the Women’s Volunteer Corps. They agreed that they could not train to kill, but thought they might help the R.A.M.C., so they got a sergeant of that corps to come and drill them. They did stretcher practice with a dummy weighing 16 stone and marched up and down and did all the appropriate drill. There was one old lady of 70 with a bonnet tied under her chin and trimmed with a rose. One day the sergeant made Miss Stokes, who had the rank of corporal, fall out and drill the party herself. Facing them suddenly she realised how extremely comic they looked, the rose in the old lady’s bonnet bobbing this way and that, and she had much ado to give the words of command without laughing. After about three months she had to go abroad for a week or two and when she returned to her great relief the corps had melted away. If only those good ladies could have looked into the future and seen the A.T.S. ! This episode attracted for a short time the amused attention of the London press.

For nearly 30 years Miss Stokes was Secretary of the Paddington Boy Scouts Association. I once saw her sitting with three scouts on a bench in the MS Department of the British Museum holding a Committee Meeting. Among the very few possessions she left behind her at her death was a treasured “Address” presented to her by her scouts after twenty-one years’ service. During the 1914-1918 war Stokes and Cox—perhaps Cox more than Stokes was at the bottom of this—with a band of helpers formed themselves into “The Ladies Territorial Committee.” No. 75 was turned into a factory for “Wind-proof Waistcoats for the Troops” made out of cast-off gloves. (Fabric gloves were almost unknown in those days). “6,000 made and sent away last year, much appreciated wherever sent” reads a circular. This had meant collecting 60,000 pairs of gloves! Elderly women glad of the work were employed to do the stitching, and perhaps some are still alive who were glad of those waistcoats in the bitter winters on the western front.
Early in the century, just before the old Queen died, the project of the Victoria History of the Counties of England was started and in this Miss Stokes took an important part. It was she who trained new-comers to the staff and organised the wholesale taking of extracts from the records at the Public Record Office, on which the topographical accounts of the different parishes are still based. But the most outstanding professional work she ever did was her articles for the Complete Peerage, to the high quality of which acknowledgments will be found in the prefaces to several successive volumes. These articles required great concentration of brain and energy and, on the top of all her other work, subjected her to considerable strain. They were the only creative bits of writing she ever allowed herself to undertake. With a sort of asceticism of the spirit, determined to crush all personal ambition, she never sought to give her abilities full scope. Devilling all her life for others was occupation unworthy of her powers of mind, and of her extraordinary capacity for sustained and concentrated application. However, the time was to come when her creative gifts were to be used in another way.

In the 1914-1918 war there had been wholesale destruction of records to produce "newsprint" for the halfpenny press. In 1919 the Report of the Royal Commission on Local Records appeared—with no result. The real property legislation of recent years had exposed vast quantities of deeds reflecting the history of the land to peril of destruction. The dangers attending local records were on two or three occasions debated at the Congress of Archaeological Societies, and one or two Counties and Societies were waking up to the situation. The demand for local records by the historian was growing. These things were simmering in Miss Stokes's mind, and indeed no-one else had anything like the first-hand knowledge which she possessed of the general condition of local records up and down the realm. "To form an organisation to deal with records from every angle and to continue taking steps to that end" is a note in her hand, dated December 19th, 1928, found after her death.

At about that time she invited two friends to meet her for luncheon at a little restaurant near the Record Office, where during the meal she propounded the outline of her great scheme for the preservation and use of local records on a nation-wide basis. Her plan was to work through the British Record Society, a well-established body whose objects were the printing of records and the taking of any necessary steps for their preservation but which had hitherto only devoted itself to printing. Her enthusiasm was catching, and before the party broke up, the ball had been set rolling.

With very little hesitation the British Record Society took up the task. Circulars were written, addresses were collected, informal consultations went on continually, the sympathy of some great London newspapers was enrolled, and a special fund of £245 was soon collected. Eminent persons were elected as vice-presidents, among them being Lord Merrivale, Lord Crawford, Josiah Wedgwood, Canon Claude Jenkins, Professor Stenton, and the Deputy-Keeper of the Public Records (Mr. A. E. Stamp). Above all, the ardent support of Lord Hanworth, then Master of the Rolls, was secured.

Public interest thus aroused, Miss Stokes was not one to let the grass grow under her feet. Aware of the destruction of records going on in London, she called on solicitors, a room was hired at 2 Stone Buildings, documents arrived in bulk, a band of experts, all volunteers, helped to sort, and soon a great stream of parcels started to flow to the repositories already appointed by Lord Hanworth for the reception of homeless
manorial records in nearly every county of England. But this was only one side of the work, though by far the most useful.

A vision now arose in her mind of a great gathering of men and women interested in records from all over the country—a gathering to be welcomed in the capital by the official head of our national records in the hall of one of the ancient City Companies, itself the owner of a long series of records going back into the Middle Ages. And here it must be remembered that in those days it made most people yawn to think about records. This dream was therefore a bold flight of imagination. "Fancy the fabric, quite, ere you build..." She brought it to a triumphant realisation. The fact that the local repositories had begun to shew signs of discontent over the distribution of records was a grand excuse for inviting them all to London to discuss their problems. The first Conference of Record and Allied Societies in England and Wales took place on November 19th, 1930, in the Hall of the Grocers' Company the day after an evening reception held by the Master of the Rolls in the Hall of the Drapers' Company. This party, like the Conference, was a brilliant success. Guests poured in from the uttermost parts of England and jostled each other as they went up the stairs to shake hands with Lord and Lady Hanworth. The Lord Mayor and Sheriffs looked in, the whole staff of the Public Record Office were there, distinguished members of learned Societies and of the great ones of the earth not a few, all wearing their orders and decorations—and it is safe to say that none went home without a determination to support "the effort to save these irreplaceable records of the life of our ancestors"—to quote Miss Stokes, the happiest woman in London that night.

In 1931 an equally successful conference was held, this time in the rooms of the Royal Historical Society, when a Resolution was passed asking the British Record Society "to obtain the views of all Societies concerned with records with a view to the permanent co-ordination of their work."

A difficult time of negotiation followed with those who wanted to bring part of the work under the auspices of the Society of Antiquaries, during which Miss Stokes with her practical good sense devoted herself to the task of rescue and distribution. "When people start arguing I get under the table," she said to me afterwards. Eventually through the intervention of Lord Hanworth a solution was found. At a crowded meeting convened by the British Record Society on November 14th, 1932, a new body—the British Records Association—came into being, the British Record Society handing over to it the balance of its special fund, its grant from the Carnegie Trust and the whole of its Conference organisation. Miss Stokes was offered, and refused, the Hon. Secretaryship, deciding to devote her main interest to the Records Preservation Section of the Association which was constituted on March 2nd, 1933. She remained, of course, one of the leading personalities of the whole Association and was a valued member of the Council.

The new Section had its ups and downs. Difficulties and frustrations which greatly distressed Miss Stokes, but did not prevent her giving what help she could, were eventually overcome. In 1936 she accepted the Honorary Secretaryship, a post which she held until her death. With a magnificent band of helpers—about 20 in number—most of whom came on to Stone Buildings after a day's toil at the Record Office, the work went magnificently forward and since that time has hardly been surpassed.
Then came the thunderbolt of war and Miss Stokes stuck to her post. The removal of hundreds of tons of records from the Public Record Office began and a large section of the staff had to remain on duty all night. Miss Stokes was asked to run a canteen, and at once agreed, though this meant rising at 5.30 each day and she was in her 70th year, and no slackening of her day-time work was possible. She carried it on for two years.

Stone Buildings had to be given up and committee meetings abandoned but in close consultation with Mr. (now Sir Cyril) Flower, she continued the work of the Section single-handed from the Record Office, and a small room which had been hired for the purpose in a house at 8 New Square. The Annual Meetings were continued. After the Baedeker raids Miss Stokes offered to go down to Exeter, where the Probate Registry had been destroyed. She returned with a box of cinders—the remains of five centuries of the wills of Devon and Cornwall. This drove the authorities to action and led to the micro-filming by the B.R.A. of the registers of wills at Somerset House.

The war also brought with it a heavy loss of printed books and manuscripts in the "salvage" drives—what a name!—and in 1941 the Association decided to try to stem this barbarous and indiscriminate destruction of the sources of our national history. Miss Stokes led the campaign for which she enlisted the help of 700 "referees"—her own name—with whom she kept in touch by personal letters, all over the country. This was the culminating effort of her life, and it told heavily on her health, though she never gave in. Already in the 30's her heart had been giving trouble. In 1936 her friend Miss Cox had died, the "crow's nest" at No. 75 was given up, and she took a flat in north London in a house with some other friends, but when the war came she established herself in a small room off Chancery Lane to be nearer her work. This room was destroyed by a bomb and she lost practically all her possessions except a few books. Her friends begged her to go down to the country. She replied: "London is the place for any old woman I command till these unpleasant days are over," and indeed, her cheerful face, her calm bravery, were a wonderful help and encouragement to the staff at the Record Office. "You told me to let you know after heavy raids," she wrote to a friend who could see the bombardments of London from her windows 50 miles away like fireworks in the sky. "Last night was the heaviest we have had—over every part of London. The P.R.O. is intact... Here it was almost continual bombardment, 9.0 p.m. to 5.0 a.m." She wrote this on April 18th, 1941. At this time she was spending the nights by herself in a cellar used for builders' materials under the hall of Lincoln's Inn, sleeping in a derelict armchair. From there she moved to a camp bed in her office in New Square where she slept among the tin deed-boxes. By 1944 her old office at 75 Chancery Lane and the former office of the Records Preservation Section in Stone Buildings had both been destroyed. Then came the flying bombs, most trying of all, and the nights were often spent in a deck chair in the porch of 8 New Square. One day, as she was dressing, the roof was hit; the house rocked, but withstood the shock though every pane of glass was smashed. She then migrated to the Public Record Office where, for the last eight months of her life, she slept on a mattress on the floor underneath a table in the library. She rose at six and helped the char-women with the cleaning and by 10.30 was at her table writing those concise and courteous notes in violet ink to her army. Until bed-time at 9.30 she worked, then lay down on the floor and slept like a little child through the wail of the sirens, the roar and crash of the bombs.
After dark on the evening of October 19th, 1944, she left the Public Record Office for a scout meeting at Paddington. On her way she was run over by a lorry crossing the street. Most characteristically, though her head was injured, she took all blame for the accident on herself and gave her name and address before she relapsed into the unconsciousness from which she never recovered. She died a few hours later in St. Mary's Hospital. Thus this high-hearted and intrepid woman left us. Her death was a terrible blow to her friends and fellow-workers. The machine she had created shuddered and went on.

Her task was accomplished. She left the local records of England on an entirely different footing from the state of neglect in which she had found them. The movement she started has spread and has struck its roots deep down into the soil. She blazed the trail for the future and the policy she laid down is slowly but surely being carried into effect. If there is one person to whom historians of the present and the future should acknowledge their debt, that person is Ethel Stokes. In her life-time, as the Master of the Rolls said, "she sought no recognition for her services and obtained none, except the respect and affection of all who worked with her."

Sustained by some inner contact with the Divine she seemed to live on a different plane from ordinary mortals. A great pioneer, a great leader, above all, a truly great woman, her life-long study of the records had given her two things: a controlled but consuming patriotism;—a deep faith in the ultimate goodness of human nature.

"Lofty designs must close in like effects:
Loftily lying,
Leave her, still loftier than the world suspects,
Living, and dying."

J.W.
NASEBY
A Note on the Preliminaries of the Battle

In popular accounts of the Battle of Naseby, the statement has often been repeated that King Charles was “a-hunting” in ignorance of Fairfax's advance into Northamptonshire, immediately before the battle. This statement was probably derived from a contemporary account, entitled: A More Exact and Perfect Relation of the Great Victory... obtained by the Parliamentary Forces under command of Sir Tho. Fairfax in Naisby Field, Saturday, 14 June, 1645, and printed the same year, in which the following sentence occurs:—“about seven at night the King being hunting in Fausely (sic) Park.”

Fawsley, of course, was the seat of the Knightley family, who had long been associated with the extreme Puritan party, and were consistently opposed to the Stuart policy in Church and State. It seemed odd that King Charles should have been hunting in the Park of such consistent opponents. However, perusal of the will of Mrs. Mary Palmer has shown that Fawsley itself was let at the time, and the family history of the Knightleys helps, in part, to explain the King’s choice of a hunting ground. In 1639, Richard Knightley of Fawsley died. He had been M.P. for the County in four Parliaments from 1621 to 1628. He left a widow, Bridget, daughter of Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote, whom he had married in 1615, but no issue. Fawsley passed to his first cousin once removed, Richard Knightley of Burgh Hall, Staffs.

Dame Bridget Knightley, the widow, was stated in an Inquest dated March 27th, 1640 to be a lunatic, enjoying lucid intervals. It may have been this circumstance that induced the heir, Richard Knightley, to let Fawsley, which he could do the more easily as he had already inherited Burgh Hall from his father Thomas, who died in 1621. Proof that Fawsley was let appears in the will of Mrs. Mary Palmer, relict of William Palmer of the family of Palmer of Lemington, Glos., who had been one of the overseers of the staff at St. James’s Park, and died intestate in 1634. Mrs. Palmer, in her will dated May 10th, 1644, gave “unto my daughter Penelope Palmer ten pounds and the lease of Fauseley and all the rent which is behind unpaid.” The Palmers were old royal servants. One of the family William Palmer (who died in 1574) was a Gentleman Pensioner to Henry VIII and Edward VI. One of Mary Palmer’s daughters, Joan, married Ludowick Carlile, the dramatist, who was groom of the Privy Chamber and Gentleman of the Bows to Charles I. She was also a painter patronised by King Charles. With such tenants at Fawsley, Charles would indeed have felt himself secure. In 1644, when Mary Palmer made her will, there was evidently a sub-tenant, who had left the rent unpaid, possibly owing to the Civil War.

GYLES ISHAM.
From about 1750 to 1850 pugilism was the favourite sport and absorbing interest of all classes of English society. The leading fighters were popular heroes, just like the prominent footballers of to-day. In Northamptonshire, as elsewhere, there were frequent set-to’s in every village, some of them fought out with as much spirit and endurance as the classic encounters of the “top-notchers.” In Northamptonshire Past and Present, (Vol. i, no. 3) there have already been vivid descriptions of two of these affairs, in Cosgrove and Wappenham respectively.

Strangely enough, there were few prize-fights of the first rank in Northamptonshire, though Watling Street, running between the two, provided easy access to the Forests of Whittlebury and Salcey, where it was easy to escape the attentions of magistrates and, later, of the police. But there were two notable contests in the area, in 1830 and 1845 respectively. As I am one of the very few people to whom accounts, however scant, of these battles have come down by word of mouth, I may perhaps be allowed to recount what as a boy I heard about them from my father, supplemented by one or two lingering traditions collected by Wimersley Bush, and by the records of contemporary periodicals, e.g., The Times, Bell’s Life, the Northampton Mercury and the Bucks Chronicle.

In the first of these encounters, Simon Byrne, champion of Ireland, met Alexander McKay, champion of Scotland. They fought on the edge of Salcey Forest on June 2nd, 1830. The contest lasted for fifty-three minutes, at the end of which time McKay lay senseless in the ring. He was carried back to his headquarters, the Watts Arms at Hanslope, where he died the next day.

My grandfather, born in 1795, who was present, told the story of the fight to my father, who handed it on to me. Unfortunately I cannot remember all the details, but I was long under the impression that McKay died in the ring. However, according to all the various reports, this was not so.

Two traditional accounts collected by Wimersley Bush are still current in Hanslope. A lively version was given by Miss Dorothy Whitbread, the Hanslope post-mistress, on August 21st, 1954. She started by saying that what she knew about the fight had been told her by her grandfather, who had been present. Laughing, she continued that he was only twelve months old at the time. His mother wanted to go and took him with her. Her husband was angry and told her when she got back that if she did that again he’d cut her legs off.

“When McKay’s mother and sister were with him at the Watts Arms,” Miss Whitbread went on. “He wasn’t fit and it was settled that he would not fight, but his backers, who had put a lot of money on him, made him do so. He was smuggled out of the inn by a ruse. A girl in the house dressed up in Scotch clothes (McKay’s, she thought) and ran
down the stairs as a blind, while McKay got out the other way through the bar window and went off to the meeting-place."

This was in a field in Bucks about 2½ miles from Hanslope on the right-hand side of the road leading from Hanslope and Longstreet to Quinton, next past the gate leading to Forest Farm and just on the Bucks side of the boundary with Northamptonshire. (The reason for choosing these boundary fields is obvious). The area is close to the Forest and is shown on the maps as Salcey Green.

"After the fight they brought McKay to the Watts Arms," said Miss Whitbread, "and a man slung him over his shoulders, holding him by the legs, so that he was upside down when carried up the stairs, which it was thought was the cause of his death. The name of the doctor who attended him was Heygate."

An account given in October, 1950, by Mr. R. W. Dickins (who, by the way, is not a native of Hanslope though he has lived there for many years) corroborates the main particulars of the first version, but adds that leeches were applied after the fight with no effect, and that it was said at the time that McKay had been drugged before the contest.

The reports of the contemporary newspapers are all interesting, as they are written from different points of view. The *Bucks County Chronicle* tells us that McKay’s downfall was due to a "settler" on the neck in the last round. It also informs us that the famous Tom Cribb¹ was one of his seconds. Owing to the fatal issue of the affair Cribb seems to have found himself in a very unenviable position, and that owing to a real act of chivalry on his part. The *Chronicle* describes it thus: "The unpleasant situation in which the ex-champion Cribb is placed is universally regretted, he having long ago retired altogether from the Ring and having been prevailed upon in an evil hour to espouse the cause of a friendless stranger,² for no man in that line of life stands higher in public estimation than Cribb." It adds that several noblemen and gentlemen were on the ground during the fight. Indeed there is some reason to think that among these were the Duke of Grafton and Lord Euston.

The report in *Bell’s Life*, the predecessor of the modern *Sporting Life*, anticipates modern journalism of the baser sort. It describes the contest as a fight between "the Irish boy and the champion of the Land of Cakes." After giving a list of prominent pugilists at the ring-side it sets out to prove that there was nothing unfair or irregular in connection with the encounter, alleging that "there was certainly no violation of Broughton’s Rules," nor was there any appeal to the referee. Strictly speaking, Byrne only acted the part of a good general determined to make the most of his physical resources."

Byrne, we are told, was treated in the Sussex Hospital at Brighton for severe sprain and laceration of the left ankle-joint. Curiously enough, he died at St. Albans after a desperate fight with "Deaf" Burke on June 2nd, 1833, exactly three years to the day after the fatal affray in Salcey Forest.

¹Tom Cribb (1781-1848) was champion of England from 1809 to 1824. He sparred before the Emperor of Russia and the King of Prussia in 1814 (D.N.B.). ²McKay came from Glasgow. ³Broughton, an early champion, drew up in 1743 a code of Rules for boxing which remained in force for nearly a hundred years, when they were replaced by the London Prize Ring Rules. Broughton brought thereby some semblance of order and decency into a sport which hitherto had been more like fighting between wild animals than between human beings.
The Northampton Mercury fairly "let itself go" in its comments on the Salcey fight. In its issue of Saturday, June 12th it wrote:

"We have always thought it disgraceful to ourselves and disgusting to our readers to notice the barbarous, filthy, and swindling exhibitions called prize-fights; but we do now summon general attention to the fatal effects of that which took place on Wednesday. One of the poor wretches, it appears hired for the sport, McKay by name, a Scotchman, has died of his blows. As to the other miscreant, who worked for hire and has therefore accidentally come under the denomination of assassin, we say nothing. We do hope however . . . that an example will be made of the monsters in this affair of blood, (namely) the sanguinary cowards who stood by and saw a fellow-creature, beaten to death for their sport and gain."

The Mercury is rather hard on the sport, for, whatever be our opinion of prize-fighting as such, it was certainly more humane and civilised than bear- and bull-baiting (not made illegal till 1835), where the poor beast stood no chance against the brutality of the baiters. As for prize-fighting, no-one need enter the ring unless he wished to, and, generally speaking, he was given every chance of winning. The brutality of which it was accused lay rather in the fact that, on the merest chance that the tide would turn, seconds would often bring their man "up to scratch" for round after round, when it was quite obvious that he was beaten and would merely serve his opponent as a chopping-block. Moreover, wrestling was allowed, which gave a distinct advantage to the larger and heavier man.

As a matter of fact, professional pugilists, when out of the ring, were usually quite good friends. This is illustrated by the account in Bell's Life of a "sporting dinner" which took place at Tom Spring's Tavern on Thursday, May 20th, 1830, to celebrate the "completion of the match" between Byrne and McKay for £100 a side. We are informed that about 40 guests sat down to an "admirable spread" and that there were present some of the most "spirited patrons" of the Ring, including Mr. Jackson, "whose high character and liberal feelings towards the members of the School of Pugilism are too well known to need commendation from us." The healths of the patrons, Mr. Jackson, Tom Cribb, Tom Spring, and "other worthies of the right sort were drunk with sincerity," and the harmony of the evening was promoted by some excellent songs. The contrast between this scene of jollity and the imminent tragedy of Salcey Forest is indeed distressing.

The Chairman (Mr. Jackson), in proposing the health of the two opponents, expressed the hope that the best man would win, and added that the match had been made by gentlemen of the highest integrity, not for the purposes of gambling, but to encourage manly feeling, honour and fair play. The idea of brutality had evidently never occurred to him.

It may be observed that Mr. Jackson, otherwise known as "Gentleman" Jackson, after winning the championship from Mendoza in 1795, immediately relinquished it, but remained the autocrat of the Ring for the rest of his life. Handsome, beautifully built, and attractive, he was long on intimate terms with the sporting section of the aristocracy and even with Royalty. He taught boxing to Lord Byron and at the coronation of George IV was engaged to form a corps of leading prize-fighters to help to keep order and prevent Queen Caroline from entering Westminster Hall and the Abbey.
Such was the esteem in which he was held by the crowd that his mission was perfectly successful.

But we are getting away from poor McKay, whose remains rest in Hanslope churchyard, where there is a gravestone to his memory. Owing to the hostility of the parson (presumably to prize-fighting) the stone was secretly erected at night-time. About twelve years ago (c. 1942) the Parochial Church Council wanted to have the inscription, which has become illegible, recut, but the then Rector would not allow it. "The stone ought not to be there at all," he said. (Information from Mr. E. T. Dickins). The epitaph, which both Mr. Dickins and his father knew by heart, ran as follows:

"Strong and athletic was my frame,
Far from my native home I came
And manly fought with Simon Byrne,
Alas! but lived not to return.
Reader, take warning by my fate,
Or you may rue your case too late;
If you have ever fought before,
Determine now to fight no more."

My father always told me that it was composed by a Scotch pack-man, a friend of my grandfather's, and almost certainly a witness of the fight. But Mr. Powell of Hanslope and the books on boxing claim that it was written by the Town Crier of Stony Stratford.

The second of our two fights, though only fifteen years later (1845), took place in a different age. The palmy days of Mr. Jackson, the Belchers, and Cribb were over, and prize-fighting had fallen into disrepute. Knavery and trickery were far too common, and fouls and riots were frequent. Indeed, each of the three encounters between Bendigo and Caunt ended in a foul; and both men, though doughty fighters, did much to bring discredit on the sport. It must be remembered that Queen Victoria had been reigning for several years; the creation of the police force in 1829 by Sir Robert Peel had done a great deal to enforce law and order, and public opinion was hardening against bare-fist fighting.

The combat in question took place under the London Prize Ring Rules of 1838, and here is perhaps the place to remind our readers of a few points laid down by them. For every contest there had to be two umpires, and a referee to whom all disputes were referred, and who was also the time-keeper. A round lasted till one or both of the principals were down, whereupon the seconds, excluded from the ring during the actual fighting, entered it, led their men to their respective corners, and did their utmost to revive them.

After 30 seconds, the referee called "Time," and each man had to walk unaided to the "scratch," a mark in the middle of the ring. (Under Broughton's Rules his seconds could assist him). The man who for whatever reason failed to "come up to scratch" was deemed to be the loser.

If any of our readers would like the epitaph to be preserved, Mr. E. T. Dickins, Hanslope, Wolverton, Bucks., who assures me that there would now be no difficulty in getting the stone re-engraved, will be very pleased to receive subscriptions for that purpose.—Ed.
If a man fell without receiving a blow, he was adjudged to have lost the fight. Sometimes fights lasted for hours. A crafty man who was exhausted and needed time to recover would fall at the lightest touch to profit by the thirty seconds' interval. Not infrequently he would repeat this indefinitely till he was fully recovered. Of course a man was disqualified who hit his opponent when the latter was down.

The battle between Ben Caunt and William Thompson (generally known as "Bendigo") was fought for the championship of England on September 9th, 1845. Bendigo was a Nottingham man and Caunt, whose father was a servant of Lord Byron's, came from a Nottinghamshire village. The two men had already fought twice, each having gained an unsatisfactory victory by reason of a foul. This fight was to end in the same way.

It was at first decided that it should take place at Newport Pagnell, and Bendigo and his supporters arrived there on the Sunday preceding the appointed date. The proposed conflict having got to the ears of the authorities, a warrant was issued against principals and promoters, and Bendigo took refuge in a neighbouring farmhouse.

Meanwhile Caunt and his backers had put up at the Cock in Stony Stratford, while the Swan at Newport sheltered Bendigo's partisans. Suddenly constables with warrants descended on Stony Stratford and announced that the fight might not take place in Buckinghamshire. This threw all the arrangements into confusion, and new plans had to be made. The first idea was to go out to Lillingstone Lovell. Then, for some reason, Whaddon was chosen. So the "fans" started on the ten-mile journey to Whaddon, where the ring was set up. Imagine the scene when the promoters, whose knowledge of geography must have been rather meagre, were informed that Whaddon was in Buckinghamshire!! Disappointed, but not discouraged, off went the crowd, doubtless having received directions, to Sutfield (pronounced "Sootfield") Green in Northamptonshire, in the parish of Passenham—a further eight miles. Ten thousand people assembled there to see the fight.

From a sporting point of view the whole affair seems to have been unsatisfactory from beginning to end—first the interference of the constables; then the geographical ignorance of the promoters, which caused the aimless and futile rushing hither and thither of the would-be spectators; lastly the dubious verdict at the end of the conflict. Moreover, the Nottingham "toughs" drove back all who could not show a Nottingham ticket. Bendigo's supporters were known as "lambs," a satirical reference to their reputation as the roughest crowd in the country.

An old friend of mine, Mr. Harry Allen, the Clerk of the Harpur Trust, once told me that his father and two friends hired a horse and trap and drove from Bedford to Stony Stratford to see the battle. His father told him that the "lambs" came by canal and looted every baker's shop in the town.

Before the fight started, there was a dispute as to the choice of a referee (another instance of mismanagement). This only ended when the famous "Squire" Osbaldeston consented, much against his will, to officiate. He was sitting in his carriage, awaiting the start of the battle. Doubtless he was approached because he was a

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1In number 2 of this Journal (p. 17) there are references to this great fight at Sutfield Green by the late Mr. B. J. Tomlin of Faulsearpury, and the late Mr. Jack Brown of Cosgrove. Its fame has remained a vivid memory for over a century. Miss Whitbread's grandfather walked from Hanslope to see this fight at the age of sixteen.
familiar figure in the district, "a devoted adherent of the Prize Ring," and formerly Master of the Pytchley Hounds.

There ensued a terrific combat of ninety-three rounds! The Squire had a most invidious task, for both men were guilty of unfairness and foul play. In the ninetieth round Caunt's supporters claimed that Bendigo had struck a foul blow. The umpires, not being able to agree about it, appealed to the referee, who stated that he had not noticed it. In the next and last round Caunt fell without being hit. Osbaldeston clearly saw this and, according to the London Prize Ring Rules, awarded the victory to Bendigo.

It was long disputed whether the decision was correct. According to one account, the Squire gave his verdict over the heads of the umpires, and it is not improbable that "Bendy," who was notorious for his tricky tactics, did strike a foul blow in the ninetieth round. The controversy was only ended when the Squire sent a letter to Bell's Life, wherein he confessed that he regarded his consent to referee as one of "the greatest acts of folly of his life." In his opinion, he added, Caunt got away from Bendigo as soon as he could and fell without a blow to avoid being hit out of time, and he fairly lost the fight.

At first, it appears, Caunt thought he had won. So, when the verdict was announced, a regular battle broke out between the respective partisans of the two men. James Brady, the author of Strange Encounters, writes: "With that fight the prize-ring took a knock-out blow from which it was long in recovering—if it ever did."

Having relieved their feelings, the spectators streamed back to Stony Stratford. By now, most of them must have been utterly exhausted. Thus every public-house was besieged and every cellar emptied—probably without payment. Indeed the publicans were reduced to serving water, which must have been a very unfamiliar beverage to many. The good people of Stony Stratford were doubtless more than delighted to see the last of this unruly mob.

Caunt then retired from the Ring. Bendigo fought once more for the championship, when history repeated itself, for he won on a foul. In or about 1870 he was overwhelmed by the evangelical fervour of one Richard Weaver, and himself became a preacher. But he still retained a trace of the "old Adam," and a scoffer who presumed too far on his change of heart was in considerable danger. Conan Doyle wrote a spirited ballad about an occasion when he "laid out" several pugilists who had come to bait him at a religious service which he was conducting. He died in 1880.

It would be interesting to hear from any people in the district to whom accounts of the fight at Sutfield Green have been handed down by word of mouth from eye-witnesses.

Mr. Geoffrey Treadwell, of Silverstone, as a boy heard his father's men discussing the fight; and till quite recently there were old people in Pauruspury who remembered seeing the crowds streaming to and from the combat, the fame of which has resounded for more than a century throughout the forest area.

C. D. LINNELL.

1H. O. Nethercote, The Pytchley Hunt, Past and Present (1888). George Osbaldeston (1787-1866), a Yorkshireman, was also Master of the Quorn. On one occasion he rode 200 miles in ten hours.