

Arcadian
Club
SCARNING



Newsletter May 2000 No.4



Between Ourselves

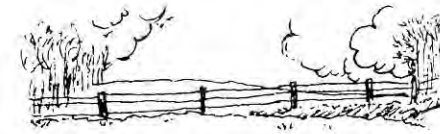
We settle into a new millennium, and another century, with all the doubts that daunting prospect brings. Of the unknown - for the future of mankind - it is worth reflecting that our ancestors probably thought the same way one hundred years ago when through their eyes they pondered on the beginning of the 20th century.

The Eastern Daily Press has recently published "Norfolk Century" - an excellent book regarding the main events, personalities and progress of life in Norfolk from 1900 to 2000. It makes fascinating reading and I recommend it to you as a good buy, if expensive at £25.

I am pleased to write that the life and work of Dr. Augustus Jessopp has not passed without notice. I quote:-

Dr. Augustus Jessopp (1824/1914) was headmaster of King Edward VI school in Norwich for twenty years before he became Rector of Scarning in 1879, looking after his country parish near Dereham for more than three decades. A number of historical works underlined an intense curiosity about everyday life in the past.

Even so, 'Arcady: for better for worse' remains for many his most intriguing work, simply because it highlights his views on village life at a time when the gap between the haves and have-nots was much wider than the Dereham bypass. His strictures on rural ignorance provoked an indignant response in the local press, including a lengthy 'Defence of the Norfolk Labourer' with a curt suggestion: 'I would advise the author of this trash to hire a country shop and live right in the midst of these so-called ignorant people: Such reaction was hardly surprising given memorable lines like these from Jessopp: 'Always shrewd, the Norfolk peasant is never tender. A wrong, real or imagined, rankles with him through a lifetime - refinement of feeling he is quite incapable of'. 'No change there then', some newcomers might mutter today! At least the learned cleric was reasonably close to those he felt obliged to chastise.



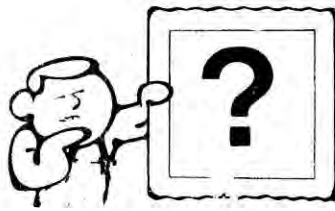
All too regularly in more recent years Norfolk has had to put up with cheap and nasty jibes from smart metropolitans firing away from a safe distance. Remarkably, Jessopp did manage to gain an ear and then the confidence of surly and suspicious villagers, and they inspired his most powerful writing. For example, he struck up an unlikely liaison with 'Loafing Ben', a burly ne'er-do-well who scraped a sort of living as a casual labourer. Jessopp called at the homestead. "His old parents were fading out of life, the vital spark in the mere ashes that remained gleaming every now and then and twinkling when a human dust was stirred by a basin of broth or a drop of some stimulant.

They were feebly cowering over the shadow of a fire in the miserable shanty, and as I sat with them and felt my way by speaking of such things as pass human understanding, I fancied I saw the semblance of faint emotion in one or the other. Somehow I found myself kneeling down upon the mud floor."

Harrowing lines from the Scarning Scholar, now enjoying a richly deserved revival with the recent formation of an Arcadian Club to spotlight his life and work. The first meeting in Scarning in 1996 features a collection towards paying for the restoration of the local graves of Augustus and his wife Margaret,

So ends Augustus Jessopp's reference in 'Norfolk Century' compiled by Keith Skipper.

On 30th March I was invited by Lady Walpole to give a talk on Augustus Jessopp during the Wolterton Programme 2000. I was pleased to take the opportunity of reaching new ears in proclaiming Jessopp's life and work, and Fred appropriately read from "Frivola" an antiquary's ghost story" written following Jessopp's visit on the 10th October 1879 to Mannington Hall and Lord Orford. Our forbears were particularly fond of ghost stories, particularly the Victorians. Unlike today with the benefits of TV, Radio and the internet, our ancestors loved using their imaginations through story telling, and it is doubtful if any small village or hamlet failed to house its own ghost. Also included in 'Frivola' is "The Phantom Coach", another popular ghost story that occupied local minds in Mid-Norfolk in the 19th Century.



Nelson at North Walsham

Readers will be interested in two letters, which Augustus Jessopp wrote to the press giving some vital background information. Mr. Walter Rye to whom he refers in the letters was elected by the Corporation of Norwich to be its Mayor in 1908. We are indebted to Mr. R.C. Fiske for this item.

To the Editor:

Sir, I am always sorry when my friend, Mr. Walter Rye, takes up his pen to write in his worst manner, - and he always does so - when he writes as a dogmatist and not as an antiquarian. In his letter in your issue of this morning, Mr. Rye takes upon himself to decide a question about which he is not one whit more entitled to deliver his verdict than any "man in the street" who may chance to swell the crowd that will assemble in the Cathedral Close tomorrow morning.

1. I entered upon the headmastership of King Edward VI School, Norwich in May 1859 - that is forty-six years ago. The first gentleman who called upon me when I became settled in the school house was Major-General Sir Robert Harvey, KCB who had served as aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington in Spain and France and was 74 years old, having been born in 1785.

Of course I was complimented by so distinguished a personage as Sir Robert calling upon me so early and greatly interested at the turn which the conversation took. I distinctly remember being told that though there had been some strong feeling as to this wisdom of removing Nelson's statue from the Market Place some eight years (?) before, "Yet," said Sir Robert, "that is the proper place for it, looking upon his old school!" Also I most distinctly remember Sir Robert assuring me that he had spoken with those who had been at Norwich School with Nelson "seventy-eight years before."



My very strong impression is that he named two of these gentlemen, but these names have passed from me.

2. When was Nelson at Norwich School? He entered the Navy in November, 1770, he was born 29th September, 1758. I suppose there can be little or no doubt he left school and went to sea when he was in his 13th year, as many another boy did in those days.

3. The Master of Norwich School at that time was the Rev. George William Lemon, a man of very considerable learning, with a great reputation as a scholar. In the year 1755 he left the University of Cambridge, and was presented by Edward Spelman, Esq., to the vicarage of East Walton with Geytonthorpe on the 9th December. Here he took pupils and wrote books of some merit till on the 23rd December 1769 he was elected to the Mastership of the Norwich School. Dr. Parr who succeeded him as Master, always spoke of him with respect as a scholar and man of learning, but goes out of his way to tell us he was not good as a "teacher," nor successful in that capacity.

4. My strong impression and firm belief is that when Lemon removed from Walton he carried many of his pupils with him, as is the wont of schoolmasters when they make a move from one post to another. I believe that Nelson was one of these. Whether the lad of 12 learnt any Greek from the sensible little Greek Grammar for boys which Lemon published in 1774 I cannot undertake to say. The book is a rarity.

Lemon resigned the Mastership of Norwich in 1778, and was followed by the far more illustrious scholar, Dr. Parr. Lemon held his livings of Walton and Geytonthorpe with the Mastership of Norwich, and he died at Walton in 1797, where I am told that a monument to his memory is still preserved.

5. But how about North Walsham? I have been endeavouring to find out something or anything about North Walsham School for more than forty



years, and I have discovered just nothing. But that Nelson was ever a boy at that school I no more believe than I do that the Duke of Wellington was then as Nelson's schoolmaster.

On the other hand, I do strongly suspect, and in my own mind, am firmly convinced, that Horatio Nelson was a pupil of Mr. Lemon at WALTON, and that he went with Lemon to Norwich, after the Christmas holidays of 1769, and remained there as a schoolboy till November 1770.

The confusion between the name WALTON and WALSHAM explains the idle story that has, in my opinion, no real foundation; unless indeed the obstinate dreams of my magnanimous old friend Walter Rye are sufficient to account for anything.

Augustus Jessopp

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That letter was later followed by a further letter from Augustus Jessopp in which he apologised to Walter Rye and gave further information. It reads as follows:

Sir: It must be clear to any careful reader of correspondence on this subject which has appeared in your columns during the last few days, that I, as a contributor to that correspondence, come out of it very badly.

Mr. Rye has smitten me hip and thigh, and if he asks for an apology, here it is at his disposal. Nevertheless, I cannot regret that I rushed into the fray so rashly; for the cause of truth has been served, and all your readers have had new light thrown upon Nelson's early school days which, but for my presumption, might never have shone upon us.

The main results of enquiries which I hope and believe have been pursued in the interests of truth, and of truth only, are these:-

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From Nelson's own words (quoted from Clarke & McArthur's "Life of Nelson" by your correspondent "S.H.L." we learn that Nelson

- (I) was sent first to the High School at Norwich and
- (II) afterwards removed to North Walsham
- (III) it was from North Walsham that he went to sea in the Raisonable.

The conclusion is inevitable, viz., that Nelson was certainly NOT a pupil under Mr. Lemon. So far from that, it appears pretty clear that he must have been at North Walsham a year or two before his removal in 1770, for Mr. Rye's quotation from "Browne's Life" shows that he was high up in the school, i.e. in the second class, from 1769 till he went to sea.

Allow that Nelson was in Norwich School in 1768, and it becomes difficult to decide who was his schoolmaster there. The Rev. Edward Simmonds, of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, became a Fellow of that college in 1758, and appears to have been elected to Norwich in 1760, and he held his mastership there till March, 1768, when he was presented to the rectory of Halcott, in Bucks. His successor was Mr. Lemon, of whom I wrote in my last letter, and who at the time of his election was sub-master of the school at Bury St. Edmund's.

Whether Nelson was removed from Norwich in the days of Mr. Simmonds or Mr. Lemon will perhaps never be known, nor why he was so removed. Simmonds appears to have been unsuccessful as a schoolmaster, and, according to Dr. Parr, Lemon was a poor teacher. We must take this for what it is worth.

The conclusion of the whole matter is this:-

1. Nelson was at Norwich School before 1769.
2. He was removed from Norwich in his eleventh year, and had certainly not been an idle lad, for he took a good position in the school at North Walsham, and in his later years corresponded with his old schoolfellows. The letter to Mr. M. Arthur, sent to you this morning by "S.H.L." is a good illustration of this trait in the great man's character.

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It will serve as a kind of expiation for my own indiscretion if I venture to send you another such letter, which has been kindly forwarded to me this morning.

It is a letter written to General William Earle Bulwer, of Heydon Hall, grandfather of an accomplished president of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, and is now preserved among the preciarhives at Heydon.

Your readers will be glad to receive a copy of this treasure, which I believe has never till now been printed.

"St. George, Baltic, May 7th 1801

"My dear Sir - I not only remember you most perfectly well at North Walsham, but am made happy in this opportunity of receiving a letter from an old schoolfellow, and have the pleasure to tell you that I have some time since recommended the high merits of Mr. Johnson to Lord St. Vincent. - Yours, ever obliged, Nelson and Bronte."

One word more to my friends, the present boys of Norwich School:

To you I say beware of making up your minds once for all on any question of history, while any doubt remains to be cleared up. One never knows what some new discovery may bring to light. Keep an open mind, and rejoice if the conclusions arrived at yesterday are upset and corrected today. Never be ashamed of being proved to be wrong; always be ashamed of seeking after anything less than the truth.

Augustus Jessopp

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE ARCADIAN CLUB
will be in Scarning Village Hall on 13th May 2000 at 7.30m



Arcady:

for Better for Worse

Continuing the theme of the introduction by David, in this Newsletter, Augustus Jessopp's views on the plight of the farm labourer and indeed the small farmer are clearly expressed in this book in which he writes of 'The Arcady of our Grandfathers.' In view of the present predicament facing the farmers of today, it is interesting to read his comments on farming and village life a hundred and fifty years ago.

He writes:

'Happily, however, the small farmers have not all been got rid of; they always have had a hard time of it, but, strange to say, they are not the people who have suffered most from the bad harvests of the past few years. The "gentleman farmer" whose pride was to carry on agriculture on the grand scale, finds he has burnt his fingers - and if he has done only that he is fortunate - the small occupant holds on. The explanation is to be sought in the fact that the one must needs be to a great extent in the power of his subordinate; the other finds his shepherd, cowkeeper, and yardman in his own household, and so keeps his labour bill at the lowest possible figure while at the same time the quality of the labour supplied is the best that can be secured.

The small man, too, is by nature and long habit cautious, thrifty and slow to launch out into expense when things are going well; he has a horror of being behind at the bankers; indeed he has some reluctance to have dealings with a bank at all, his credit does not stand so high that he is ever tempted to trade far beyond his capital.

What does the big man care.....? Why should an agriculturalist who has embarked ten thousand pounds in the stocking of his farm not have his amusements as well as the tradesman with far less to fall back upon? If the landlord is to live in luxury out of the rent, the tenant must not expect to do so too; or the other must come down.

"How do you manage to pay all your outgoings in these bad times?" I said to one good woman whose husband farms some fifty acres at a ruinous rent. "Why, you see sir, the corn about pays the landlord and sich, and then we reckon to live, and there's seven of us, and we all help. I don't know how we do, but we keep going."

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Jessopp relates the story of a peasant named Wiffin as a typical Arcadian of the times:



His father was killed by an accident, his mother was left with four sons, of who he was the eldest; the rest all died young. He was just fourteen. Of course he had to go to work. The parish gave him a *suit of clothes*. What were they? A "flannel jacket kind of a jersey as they call 'em now," a pair of leather breeches without buskins, and a pair of shoes. Thus fitted out he was "let out you know" to a man of the name of Emms *for his board and no wages*. There were four men and boys in the little homestead. Emms had no family. Mrs. Emms did the dairy and the cooking by the help of a girl whom she worked like sin. They had plenty to eat *"and a deal more meat than they get now;"* the bread, however was 'awful.' The two serving boys (Wiffen was one; Judd, another of my old friends, was another) had to sit in the "what you may call the back kitchen like." All through the long winter evenings there they sat with never a pretence of fire. Sometimes in the bitter frost and snow they'd leave open the door of the living room where Farmer Emms was enjoying his pipe.

Mrs. Emms was "getting the victuals," and the girl was spinning. The two men were out in the stable or the cowhouse - "they were a good deal warmer than we" - and the monotonous day came to an end with a bowl of milk and a hunch of the "awful" bread.

At eight o'clock everybody used to turn in. The men and boys, as far as I can make out, seem to have had no bedsteads; they slept "anyhow - top o' the house mostly."



Wiffen has a vivid recollection of his first night at Emm's, for he and Judd have often recurred to it. Wiffen, being soft of heart, lay awake crying for his mother. "I kep' a a thinking on her. I dunno how it war, somehow I couldn't help a dreamin' as she wanted me. Judd, being of sterner metal, chose him out a warm retreat - for it was cold. They were going to brew next day, and he - *he slept in the mash tub!*" "I heard him a-snoring, and he made out as he heard me a-crying, but that ain't so."

The poor throve on the hard work and abundant food. "How did you get your clothes if you got no wages?" "I didn't get no clothes. I was always a little 'un, yet I grew, and when my first year came to an end I said to my master, 'Look here!' and I showed him how I had nothing between my breeches and my jacket. We used to fasten up our breeches with a strap or a cord. I couldn't buy a strap, so I had to truss up with string, and the breeches were good breeches, but they were too heavy for the jacket, and they'd tore the bottom part off. So I says to master, 'Look here!' says I, 'I can't go on so.' And he was put out about something, and he took me up short, and says he, 'Then you may go off so!'"

And I did go off, and I went and hired myself with Farmer Olde - up that way - and there I was to get a pound a year, for he knew I was handy. It requires a considerable effort of imagination to throw ourselves back into the days when tens of thousands of grown men and women were to be found who *never spent anything* from one year's end to another. "A *good man sometimes* used to get ten pounds - I've heard of one or two," says Wiffen, "but then they were extraordinary good men. *There didn't appear to be any money then!*"

The same absence of money in the rural districts showed itself in a hundred different ways. It never occurred to people that everything could be reduced to a money value. "Nobody knew anything about soap and candles. In the goodish farmhouses the girls used to cut the rushes and dry them, and then there used to be a boiling of the fat, and sometimes they used to let poor folks bring their own dry rushes and dip 'em for nothing.



Spinning was mostly going out, but *some on 'em* kept it on much longer than others, and the buyers used to come round and take the yarn and bring back cloth, and sometimes it was poor cloth too, and then they used to quarrel.

Old Bidy Wiffen has her vivid recollections too. Worked up to virtuous indignation she becomes voluable, and then is your time. "Gals! there ain't no gals - they're ladies. You've got to call 'em Miss, or they'll sauce you! When I was young I was a gal! I was one of the lucky ones, though, I was. You mayn't credit it, but it's as true as you're sitting there: *I never had a mistress as ever give me a flogging - not one!*"

I know not how my readers will receive this solemn asseveration, but it came to me with a shock of pathos that almost unmanned me. On enquiry I found that these boys and girls in the old farmhouses at the beginning of the century were treated at times with an amount of brutality almost inconceivable to us.

POACHING, as we understand it now, was almost unknown. There were scores of landowners who lived on their small estates and never dreamt of aping the follies of the great men. Pheasant coops, and battues, and beating covers, and driving birds, these things were all in the future. What was the use of going out with nets and snares when every *pightel* had its corners thick with brushwood and every parish had hundreds of acres of gorse and thickets which practically was no man's land?

Every field had its huge hedgerow, with the "doddles" or pollards, which afforded firing for rich and poor. "We used to hear 'em of a night sometimes up an old tree chopping," says one old farmer; "and we usen't to say anything to 'em as long as they didn't pull up the hurdles." All this underwood with the turf in the *pulk hole* or bog lands, which the women used to cut and store, was not infrequently pilfered and fought about, constituted the only fuel at the beginning of the century. It is difficult to make out when labourers first began to burn coal; it must have come in gradually. "*I never saw coal till after I was married,*" says old Sally Tuttle, who is past eighty, "and I never burnt any till my second husband bade me bring some from Dereham. We used to bring it tied up in a bundle and carry it on our heads."