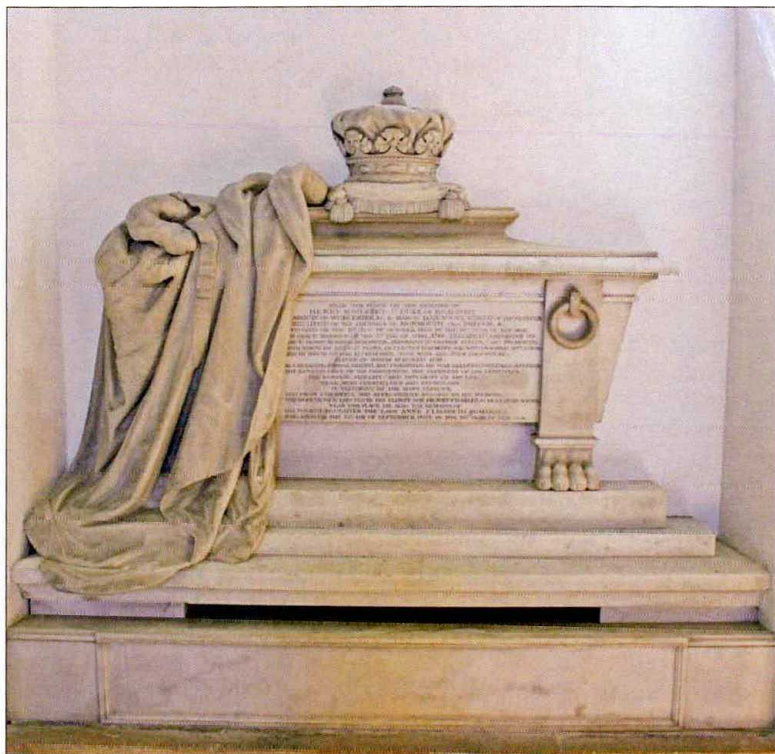


# PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY JOURNAL



Memorial to Henry Somerset, 5th Duke of Beaufort (1744–1803)  
St Michael & All Angels, Great Badminton

He was one of those men, and they are not the commonest, of whom we can know the best only by following them away from the market place, the platform, and the pulpit, entering with them into their own homes, hearing the voice with which they speak to the young and aged about their own hearthstone, and witnessing their thoughtful care for the everyday wants of everyday companions, who take all their kindness as a matter of course, and not as a subject for panegyric.

(The Rev. Adolphus Irwine, Rector of Broxton & Vicar of Hayslope,  
in G. Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 1859)

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## EDITORIAL

During the lockdown I have found that diary-reading is the deal antidote to the threat of boredom, replacing one's own physically inactive life with someone else's more 'normal' regime. James Lees-Milne's diaries were perfect for this purpose and, having completed them, I'm currently embarked upon those of Frances Partridge. The first volume, *A Pacifist's War*, shows some remarkable parallels between then (the years of the Second World War) and now. This grim entry made in April 1940, for example:

The news is now entirely concerned with air-raids. Inside every head in England the same questions are revolving: "How many killed? How many injured? How is everyone 'standing up' to the raids?"

And, at the end of the war after 'Winston has announced that there will be no more blackout restrictions', Frances finds it 'quite difficult to leave windows uncurtained and blazing away into the darkness', much as we, perhaps, will only slowly adapt, when that happy day comes, to the lifting of social distancing and abandoning our masks.

Readers of John Beresford's 1931-32 *Journal* (published by the Society and still available) will know that Beresford was a friend of the Bloomsbury figure Saxon Sydney Turner. Turner was also a friend of the Partridges and Frances records on 18 October 1940, 'poor Saxon writes very despairingly saying that two of his best friends at the Treasury were killed last night. The Treasury must have been hit, though he doesn't say so'. It was, and one of those 'best friends' was Beresford.

Social distance in the sense of class distinction was, of course, very much a feature of eighteenth century life and the differences which existed even between students in the ancient universities constitute just one of the very many matters we encounter in Margaret Bird's quite brilliant essay – the first of two – on 'The Norfolk Parish Clergy of James Woodforde's Time'. Margaret's ground-breaking work, not least that involving the bishop's visitation returns, will certainly provide the reader with a great deal of food for further thought on the Norfolk clergy in general and Woodforde in particular.

Similarly stimulating is our President's essay on the process by which Weston parsonage came to mean 'home' and 'our comfortable, quiet, happy thatched dwelling', to Woodforde.

Woodforde missed the first performance of John Howard Payne's opera *Clari, or the Maid of Milan*, which contains Henry Bishop's song 'Home! Sweet Home!', by a good twenty years but had he heard it he would surely have sympathized with the couplet which runs –

An exile from home splendour dazzles in vain,  
Oh, give me my lowly thatched cottage again.

House-bound as most of us have been for the past year, I doubt if the sentiments of 'Home! Sweet Home!' have been expressed quite so fervently this last year as in most twelve month periods. Happy as I am with my own High Peak home, it would have been nice to indulge in 'pleasures and palaces' too, and that might have been what took my imagination to Badminton House which was home to Woodforde's friend Robert Penny.

Staying at home has had the advantage of allowing us not only to read more but also to put pen to paper. If your own Journal contribution has not yet appeared you can be assured that it will. In selecting articles, I always endeavour to balance Norfolk and Somerset, Family History with Social History, Woodforde with his Times. Whether I succeed I'm not sure that I'm the one to judge. What I can say, after more than twenty years of editorship, is that I cannot remember a period when the quality of work coming forward has been quite so high as at present.

Those of you that 'expressed an interest' in the frolic – which was to have been in September of last year, and then in May of this, will by now know that it has been postponed once more – to 13-15 September. As originally proposed, we will be based at Holbrook Manor hotel, Wincanton. I think we can have every reason to be optimistic of our prospects and much look forward to meeting you in a safe and civilised environment!

# THE NORFOLK PARISH CLERGY OF JAMES WOODFORDE'S TIME

## Part 1: Letting off steam to the bishop

So often we see James Woodforde characterised as the typical Georgian parson, 'the very epitome of the country clergy' of his time. But was he? And did he really serve the 'spiritually comatose base of the Church of England', as Ronald Blythe asserted? This study will argue that both are myths. There was no such being as the typical Georgian parson. And the Church was far from drifting 'in its doldrums' in Norfolk.<sup>1</sup>

The article will also point to an exciting, dynamic time for parishioners, who enjoyed a very wide range of religious provision—if they could seize the opportunity to sample it. The ability to worship extra-parochially or outside the Established Church could be restricted, but probably not totally suppressed, in an estate village like Weston, under the control of generations of the Rokewood and Custance family as squires.<sup>2</sup> It was in the towns and the open villages that religious diversity could flourish more freely and a consumerist culture develop.

The parish clergy knew themselves to be in competition with a variety of other preachers, including roving Anglican Evangelicals. This new breed, who as curates and occasionally incumbents became missionaries to groups of country parishes, will be described in Part 2. Clergymen differed hugely, as did their settings. James Woodforde was one of the most fortunate. Established for life in one of the most lucrative livings in the county; resident in its parsonage; on good terms with his patrons; having no need to seek a further incumbency or a curacy to bolster his finances; and based within twelve miles of the stimulus of the provincial capital: Weston's rector could enjoy an unusually comfortable style of living. It was one very far removed from the great majority of the Norfolk clergy of his time.

We shall meet a rather more common type of clergyman. This was the starveling curate, reliant on a miserly income such as Woodforde allowed his own curates when the time came. The hapless subordinate would lead a restless, pressured life as he served two, three or even four parishes simultaneously in a desperate effort to make ends meet.

## Educational background

The gulf between the various types of parish clergy had opened wide even before they were ordained. The social and financial divide is evidenced by their academic dress and preserved for posterity in Ackermann's famous prints. Leaving aside the nobility, who had the most ornate, all-enveloping gowns but were unlikely to seek ordination, a good number came from well-off families and were privately funded through university as fellow-commoners. They wore considerably more showy gowns than those of the scholar, or pensioner, who was funded in part by an endowment from a society (such as the Elland Society for young Evangelicals) or from his old school (such as the closed scholarships provided at New College, Oxford for Winchester boys, or at King's College, Cambridge for Etonians).

At the rear, in the plainest, shabbiest gown, came the servitor at Oxford and sizar at Cambridge. Housed in a cold garret, he was required to carry out menial tasks and wait upon his fellows. Bedmaking, fetching water and coals and sweeping bedchambers fell to the lot of these young men of straitened means. The distinctions in status were carried through to daily life, with only noblemen and fellow-commoners being permitted to dine in hall at the same table as senior members of the college. All students however received the same tuition.

Woodforde was lucky to be 'made a scholar of New College', the opening entry in his diary. He had a clerical father who was prepared to devote the vast sum of £80 to securing a scholarship at a well-endowed college for his anxious son in 1759; the figure represented four or five times the annual salary commonly paid at the time to a Norfolk curate for a single parish. It was a long-drawn-out saga, as the young James was seemingly not intellectually gifted at school. At his first attempt to gain an Oxford place in 1757 he was listed nineteenth out of 24—a ranking which would have excluded him from New College. He managed to scrape into Oriel, but after a year resolved to try again. New College represented a far greater prize, having at its disposal 46 attractive benefices. The gambit worked—but at a hefty price: it required his father to pay a series of inducements.<sup>3</sup> Given these early uncertainties, and his ten years as a curate himself, it is surprising



*Early-19th-century Cambridge academic dress: fellow-commoner by Ackermann (left), pensioner by Harrenden (right).*

that Woodforde in later life withheld so much of his disposable income from his curates at Weston. They would have had the painful sense they were not valued.

Further educational distinctions existed. It was by no means expected that a clergyman had to be a graduate. Some dioceses, especially in Yorkshire and Cornwall, had high numbers of 'literates', as non-graduate ordinands were called. To assess how far the Norwich see, which also included most of Suffolk, was peopled by non-graduates I examined the ordination registers for deacons and priests over two sample six-year periods: 1754–59 and 1784–89. I noted the ordinands' universities and colleges—if they had them. In those two periods the Norwich bishops conducted 156 and 197 ordinations respectively of Cambridge men, of whom 48 and 57 belonged to Caius College alone. They ordained a far lower number, 22 and 31, from Oxford in those periods. Three in each period came from the Scottish universities. New College provided

no ordinands in the first period and only one in the second; Oriel provided one in each. In 1754–59 fifteen literates were ordained in the Norwich see; in 1784–89 a total of twenty.<sup>4</sup> The Norwich diocesan registers miss many of the deacons, who would be ordained in their university: by the Bishop of Ely in Ely Cathedral if at Cambridge, or by the Bishop of Oxford in the cathedral chapel of Christ Church (like Woodforde in May 1762) if at Oxford.

Given this marked imbalance between Oxford and Cambridge within the see of Norwich we can note another way in which Woodforde was far from typical among his ‘brethren’. He was an Oxford man, and educated at a major public school; most Norwich clergy by contrast were Cambridge-educated and had attended East Anglian market-town grammar schools.<sup>5</sup> Further, his West-Country accent would have signalled to Weston’s flock that their rector was different, with unfamiliar speech. Public schools in those days did not try to eradicate local accents: this was only later to become a Victorian and Edwardian preoccupation.

### **Parish statistics**

We need now to set the scene. Norfolk had a higher parish density than any other county in the British Isles. This lavish profusion, while conferring certain benefits for both clergy on the move and their wandering flock who eagerly took up sermon-tasting, brought in its wake problems for clerical ministry and encouraged absenteeism. Although we do not learn of this from Woodforde, mobility by both preacher and congregation was part of regular religious life in many parts of Norfolk. Weston, near the centre of the county and Woodforde’s base for almost 27 years, was unusually large at 2737 acres (the figure given in William White’s 1845 county directory). The average for Norfolk as a whole, using the same source, was 1707 acres. And in the north-east quadrant, into which Weston falls, the average was even smaller; it was the sprawling parishes of the Brecks and the Fens in the south and west which raised the average. In the Coltishall area on the northern Broads, where Woodforde’s fellow diarist Mary Hardy (1733–1809) was based in the 1770s, the average was 1279 acres. In the area around Holt near the north Norfolk coast, to which she moved in 1781, it was 1336.<sup>6</sup>

Why is this significant? This most unusual density of settlement, laid down by Saxon and Dane, enabled people to get about easily. The curate hurrying between three or four parishes on a Sunday, the rector covering for his fellow priest nearby in an emergency, the flock determined to sample a neighbouring parish church as well as one or two Nonconformist meetings, or attending an evening meeting during the week; even brewers building up a portfolio of tied houses to be served by their loyal draymen: all, with their beasts, benefited from an intricate network of highways, lanes and public houses. Rural Norfolk in 1800 enjoyed good provision for residents and itinerants on the move: one public house served an average of 222 persons, including children.<sup>7</sup>

Public houses were essential in enabling people to get about and underpinned the infrastructure of rural distribution for local businesses. Some are marked on the county maps by Faden (1797) and Bryant (1826); almost certainly the surveyors responsible for the maps relied daily on these refuges and service-providers. Labourers building navigations, and even certain Nonconformist preachers hastening to the next meeting, called at the alehouse: beer and Bibles could still go happily hand in hand in Woodforde's time.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike the townships of the north of England, there was no need for a chapel of ease in a rural parish in Norfolk. Such chapels grew up in the larger towns, as did St Nicholas's at King's Lynn, or St George's at Great Yarmouth. These new places of worship had been built earlier in the eighteenth century to accommodate the overspill from the great parish churches of St Margaret and St Nicholas and, as chapels, did not require the cumbersome machinery of a parliamentary statute to create a new parish and new parish church.

To demonstrate the opportunities provided by high parochial density I calculated how many parishes lay within an hour's walk of Coltishall (three miles) and an hour's cart-ride of Letheringsett (4½ miles), where in her later years Mary Hardy became a confirmed sermon-taster. (As she grew older she took to getting about in the farm cart, instead of walking.) The startlingly high number of seventeen parishes lay within reach of the first, and twenty-five of the second.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously, the larger the parish in acreage terms the less such

opportunities arose. An extensive parish like Weston would reinforce the sense of being cut off and act as a brake on widescale sampling. The landscape around the built-up area of Weston today shows fields as far as the eye can see. But on the Broads, or in much of north and north-east Norfolk, one can walk to what passes for higher ground and spot five, six or seven flint-towered churches within reach—at least where river crossings in the way of bridges, ferries and fords permit.

### **Visitation returns as sources**

Before turning to the distinct types of cleric in Part 2 this is the moment to look at an outstanding contemporary source. Each of the Norwich bishops' 1296 parishes, including even those with sinecure livings, was sent a very long printed questionnaire in the years 1784, 1794 and 1801. Room was left for the respondent (the resident or absentee incumbent, or officiating curate) to fill in the answers by hand. The returns form an invaluable resource, some of the Cambridge men with a strong mathematical bent as former Wranglers excelling at filling the pages with a stream of information and analysis; at times they appended continuation sheets containing further detailed responses and tabulated data.<sup>10</sup>

No other source so clearly illustrates the differences between the clergy of the time. These men jostle on the pages in a glorious miscellany: the Latitudinarian, in turn lofty, generous and tolerant; the driven, puritanical Evangelical and Sabbatarian; the harassed, overworked curate, filling in for an absentee where required across multiple parishes; and the perpetual curate of a leading parish church like the Revd Dr Samuel Cooper (1739–1800), of St Nicholas, Great Yarmouth, 11th Wrangler at Magdalene in 1760.<sup>11</sup>

Some were evidently leaders of local society; self-confident in the presence of the bishop, they treat us to some memorable one-liners. The Revd Dr Charles Poyntz (1735–1809), brother to Countess Spencer and uncle of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, observed wryly in 1794 of his North Creake parishioners: 'All of one profession of the Church of England, united in faith—would to God they were so in brotherly love'.<sup>12</sup> Others, notably the curates, were put upon: both by their incumbent, who might live on the other side of the country or even overseas, and by their sullen, distrustful

parishioners, clearly more attached to the cottage meeting house than the church. Loneliness, depression and lack of sympathetic companionship run through the returns. The rural isolation which oppressed Anna Maria Woodforde and, fleetingly, her brother William at Weston Rectory was the lot of a great many of the clergy. We might expect their uncle, as a prolific writer, to be one of the leading respondents, providing the bishop with vital insight into the challenges facing the Church of England on the ground. Sadly this is not the case. Woodforde's replies are some of the most minimalist found in the hundreds of returns consulted. He frequently omitted to answer the questions; even more frequently he wrote cramped, monosyllabic responses, surely risking causing offence to the prelate. In his study of Woodforde Roy Winstanley identified a side to the diarist which comes out clearly in the complete text. Writing of Woodforde's undergraduate days, the biographer concludes:

In a way, his attitude [towards his academic work] was rather like that towards his parish work, in the years when he was a beneficed clergyman. In each case, he did what was required of him, but without enthusiasm. The fire and spirit that came from a sense of vocation were missing.<sup>13</sup>

From the evidence of the returns we cannot even say that he did what was required of him. The Weston returns are spectacularly uninformative.

A striking feature of the Norfolk returns is the toleration and generosity of spirit shown by the clergy towards their competitors, the Nonconformist preachers; their understanding of the pressures facing their parishioners, including the overworked children, also comes across clearly.<sup>14</sup> The clergy felt a strong bond with the poorer members of their flock—a bond they did not share with the poor's masters, especially the leading farmers who, so the clergy considered, failed to set a good example. Even parish officers did not come to church.<sup>15</sup> Woodforde had close relatives who were farmers, yet his distancing from Weston's farmers, and their wives, is representative of the many.

The former sizers in particular show great humanity in their responses; they too had borne the badges of poverty and inferiority in their formative years. They make up a significant proportion of

the Norfolk clergy. The diarist Mary Hardy names forty graduate clergymen in her circle of acquaintance, not including the literates. Of these, 36 had been at Cambridge and four at Oxford. Of the Cambridge men, sixteen (two-fifths of the total of forty) had been sizars, including her own rector the Revd John Burrell senior (d.1786 aged 51 or 52), with whom she was on good terms. She did not manage to pull this off with his son, successor and namesake, despite the younger John's exemplary and imaginative ministry. A man of great energy and wide interests, and a former pensioner (scholar) at Cambridge, the implacable Toryism which he carried into the pulpit alienated the Whiggish anti-war Hardys.

One of the most contentious topics in the returns is the disposal of the offertory money, the church collection proving far more socially divisive than tithes. On the whole it was the individual clergy who nominated the recipients of alms: the poor attending service, or poor women only, or the sick and needy in their homes, or, controversially, only those attending Communion. Unsurprisingly, partaking of the Sacrament shoots up in those parishes where this last prevailed. When the younger John Burrell (1761–1825), acting as curate of nearby Stody, dispensed the offertory money 'to the sick and such poor people as constantly attend the Sacrament', the small parish, with 149 souls in 1801, witnessed a most impressive 18.1 per cent of the total population lining up at the Communion rail in 1794. Conversely the participation rate drops when, as at Melton Constable with Burgh Parva, the collection is taken only *from* communicants!<sup>16</sup>

Woodforde, in the staccato style which forms such a contrast with the fluency of his diary entries, tells the bishop in 1801 that he himself collects the offertory—and promptly leaves it at that. His fellow clergy would, as requested, explain what they did with the money. Is it possible that the Weston rector's individual acts of charity (a sixpence here, a shilling there) sprang not from his private purse but as distribution of the offertory? In his return of 1794 he had opened up sufficiently to guide us: the offertory money 'is disposed of by me to the sick, infirm and aged'.<sup>17</sup>

True to form, the observations of Dr Poyntz over at North Creake stand out from the rest. He was the sole minister found in the returns who *banked* the offertory.<sup>18</sup>

## Lack of parsonages

A recurrent anxiety for successive bishops involved absenteeism, the concomitant of pluralism in the days before the early Victorians overhauled the system and increased clerical incomes. Often there was no resident cleric as the parish had no parsonage, so each survey would include a question about living arrangements. This is just one question, the sixth, in the 1794 questionnaire at Bishop Charles Manners Sutton's primary visitation:

VI. Do you constantly reside upon your cure, and in the house belonging to it? If not, where and at what distance do you reside? How long in each year are you usually absent? And what is the reason of such absence? Have you more benefices than one? Do you serve any church besides your own? <sup>19</sup>

If there was one topic guaranteed to provoke a stream of protests from the Norfolk clergy, other than Woodforde in his thatched and treasured retreat, it was the inadequacies of the parsonage house. The returns provided a welcome means of letting off steam to the bishop. The Revd Lancaster Adkin (1740–1807) was one of the most distinguished Norfolk clerics of Woodforde's time and the Oxford man's exact contemporary. A poor sizar at Caius, Cambridge, his career had a totally different trajectory. The energetic, dynamic Adkin came from a commercial family and founded the first Sunday schools in the county in 1785, for girls and boys, at St Stephen's, Norwich. He held in plurality a number of livings and curacies: Vicar of Scottow (near North Walsham) 1767–1807, Rector of Belaugh (on the Broads) 1768–1807, Curate of the Norwich churches of St Stephen and of All Saints, and Perpetual Curate of St Andrew's 1790–1807, also in the city.

The puritanical Adkin comes across as extremely forceful and fluent in his published sermons; nor did he restrain himself when hectoring the bishop over the many hurdles he encountered in his ministry. His indignation would be roused by those of his flock attached to working and playing on Sundays rather than churchgoing; they could be the neglectful rich as well as the pleasure-seeking poor. Not the least of his difficulties was Belaugh's damp rectory beside the River Bure:

I reside chiefly at Norwich but constantly serve my own churches and no other. The small cottage . . . which is the parsonage house

is so damp in itself and on the bank of a river that having been once deprived of the use of one arm for three months by the rheumatism which has never been perfectly recovered I can only be there occasionally in the summer—having been obliged for near twelve months to wear my arm in a sling.<sup>20</sup>

The parsonage as a family base and hub of a busy pastoral ministry came into being only from 1604, when the sanctioning of clerical marriage by law was finally resolved under James I; Elizabeth had notoriously prevaricated after her sister Mary had reimposed the ban lifted by their brother Edward.<sup>21</sup> These early buildings, often existing cottages, were termed hovels in some of the late-eighteenth-century returns and were regarded as unfit for a professional man with an expanding family. Other buildings had become so dilapidated as to be no more. There were just not enough rectories and vicarages to house all the incumbents, let alone the curates. Even as late as 1835 in England and Wales as many as 2848 benefices (just over one quarter of the total) lacked a parsonage. In a further 1728 parishes the house was uninhabitable.<sup>22</sup>

Occasionally an incumbent lived in his own home in the parish or nearby. Technically this made him non-resident as he did not ‘reside upon his cure’, in the contemporary phrase. Once again Woodforde stands out as distinct. He had a reasonably good house, but there is no sense from his diary entries, nor from his niece’s diary written in the house in 1792, that it served as the hub of the village.<sup>23</sup> The modest alehouse across the road from the church probably bore that palm.

When we immerse ourselves in Woodforde’s easy prose it is all too easy to forget what a good billet he had. True, he had troubles of his own at the start of his settled ministry in the sorry ‘dilapidations’ dispute with the widow of his predecessor Dr Ridley.<sup>24</sup> Weston Parsonage was also inclined to be intensely cold and inconvenient, with fireplaces emitting more smoke than warmth; and it had no dedicated dining room. But it was perfectly adequate for a quiet bachelor with just a nephew or niece as companion and not much given to hosting large gatherings in his two reception rooms.

Part 2 continues in the next issue, where we shall look at the widely differing types of rural cleric and their ministry.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *very epitome* This, with the other epithets, is taken from the introduction by Ronald Blythe to a superbly illustrated edition of extracts from Woodforde's diary (*J. Woodforde, A Country Parson: James Woodforde's diary 1759–1802* (Century Publishing, London, and Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 9, 10).
2. *Weston* The parish increasingly over the twentieth century gained the name Weston Longville, perhaps as the parson's first editor John Beresford customarily used it. But this is the village's *manorial* name, and as such was the name adopted by New College, Oxford, owners of the advowson. In Woodforde's time the Bishop of Norwich in his despatch of printed visitation forms, the Norwich press and even Woodforde himself (apart from the sole occasion when he used the manorial name on hearing of the initial offer from New College) always referred to the parish and the living merely as Weston. The Custances lived at Weston House, not Weston Longville House; the Rokewoods' former house was Weston Old Hall. In a similar vein, residents tend not to refer to Aylsham Lancaster, or Fakenham Lancaster.
3. *scholar* Roy Winstanley describes in detail the events of 1757–59 leading to this happy, but very costly, outcome. The chapter is tellingly entitled 'Elections and Bribery' (*Parson Woodforde: The life and times of a country diarist* (Morrow & Co., Bungay 1996), pp. 40–6). Woodforde matriculated while at Oriel, not New College.
4. *ordinations* Norfolk Record Office (NRO): DN/ORR 3/1, ff. 32–52; and DN/ORR 3/2, ff. 134–66. The figures are tabulated and displayed as a graph in the third of Margaret Bird's four volumes of commentary and analysis, *Mary Hardy and her World 1773–1809* (Burnham Press, Kingston upon Thames, 2020): Volume 3, Spiritual and social forces, pp. 73–5. Explanatory notes are also given. The volume contains short biographies of a few of the 'literal persons', as literates were also termed in the registers.
5. *schools* These are named for each graduate in John Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigienses*; he also identifies nobles, fellow-commoners, pensioners and sizars. Joseph Foster's *Alumni Oxonienses* omits this useful information.
6. *parish acreages* These and related figures are tabulated and interpreted in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World 1773–1809*: Volume 1, A working family, pp. 16–20. See also a discussion of the Anglican footprint in Volume 3, pp. 30–44, with maps and tables.
7. *public houses* See tables 2.9.1 and 2.9.2 in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World*: Volume 2, Barley, beer and the working year, pp. 514, 515. Figures are calculated from the national census of 1801 and the alehouse register 1789–99 for the hundreds of Norfolk (thus not including the boroughs): NRO: C/Sch 1/16.
8. *public houses* Mary Hardy was the wife and mother of farmers, maltsters and brewers. The topics of distribution and the role and density of public houses are explored in detail in Volumes 2 and 4 of *Mary Hardy and her World*. Although a good-sized village, with 365 souls in 1801, Weston had poor provision. There was just the one modest Hart or Heart to ease the lives of the local population and of those travelling through: NRO: C/Sch 1/16.

9. *willingness to wander* M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World: Volume 3*, pp. 30–9; see in particular the maps on pp. 38 and 39 covering a three-mile radius from Coltishall and a 4½-mile radius from Letheringsett.
10. *visitation returns* The series for the years 1777, 1784, 1794, 1801, 1806 and 1813 is held in the Norfolk Record Office under the overall catalogue reference DN/VIS, followed by the deanery number. Thus Sparham deanery, covering Weston, is under DN/VIS 29a/9 for 1784; 34a/7 for 1794; and 38/6 for 1801. The Bishop of Norwich had direct oversight of all 1296 parishes, there being no suffragan bishops then. I am very grateful to W.M. (Bill) Jacob for first alerting me to this neglected source in his thesis ‘Clergy and society in Norfolk, 1707–1806’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 1982). His later study covers the clerical profession across the whole country: W.M. Jacob, *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century, 1680–1840* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
11. *Dr Cooper* See in particular his return for 1784 (NRO: DN/VIS 30/11, Flegg deanery visitation 1784, Great Yarmouth return).
12. *Dr Poyntz* NRO: DN/VIS 33a/2, Burnham deanery visitation 1794, North Creake return. He noted there were no Papists, Dissenters or Quakers in this village north of Fakenham. This does not mean there were no Methodists. Most clergy in the returns classed Methodists (both Calvinistic and Wesleyan) as Nonconformists and not as belonging to a Dissenting tradition. The leaders George Whitefield, Lady Huntingdon and John Wesley all regarded themselves as faithful Anglicans.
13. *without enthusiasm* R. Winstanley, *Parson Woodforde*, p. 52.
14. *children* The Sabbatarian Lancaster Adkin explained to the bishop that the Belaugh children did not attend the Sunday school he had attempted to establish in this tiny parish of 22 houses. The youngsters were either working on a Sunday or the parents took pity on them and allowed them playtime ‘even in the time of service’ (NRO: DN/VIS 34a/4, Ingworth deanery visitation 1794, Belaugh return).
15. *parish officers* The conscientious Revd Joseph Alderson had no support from his leading parishioners at Hevingham, near Aylsham, where only paupers attended church; neither did the Evangelical Revd William Upjohn at Briningham and Field Dalling in north Norfolk (NRO: DN/VIS 38/3, Ingworth deanery visitation 1801, Hevingham return; DN/VIS 41/4, VIS 46/7, Holt deanery visitations 1806 and 1813, Briningham and Field Dalling returns). Such complaints were common.
16. *Stody and Melton with Burgh* NRO: DN/VIS 33a/4, Holt deanery visitation 1794, Stody and Melton returns. There is much more on Communion rates and the offertory in M. Bird, *Mary Hardy and her World: Volume 3*, pp. 32–44, 86, 90–2, 369.
17. *Weston offertory* NRO: DN/VIS 34a/7, Sparham deanery visitation 1794, Weston return.
18. *banking the offertory* NRO: DN/VIS 33a/2, Burnham deanery visitation 1794, North Creake return.
19. *absenteeism* NRO: eg DN/VIS 33a/6, Walsingham deanery visitation 1794.

20. *Mr Adkin* NRO: DN/VIS 29a/6, Ingworth deanery visitation 1784, Belaugh return. His underlining is given here in *italic*.
21. *clerical celibacy* A. Tindal Hart, *The Curate's Lot: The story of the unbeneficed English clergy* (The Country Book Club, Newton Abbot, 1971), pp. 26, 63–4. Elizabeth had very reluctantly permitted marriage, but the issue had not been confirmed in law.
22. *parsonage figures* N. Sykes, *Church and State in England in the 18th century* (Cambridge University Press, 1934), p. 216.
23. *Anna Maria Woodforde's diary* D. H. Woodforde, ed., 'Nancy Woodforde: A diary for the year 1792', *Woodforde Papers and Diaries* (Parson Woodforde Society and Morrow & Co., Bungay, 1990).
24. *dilapidations* M. Brayne, 'The wretched dilapidations dispute', *Parson Woodforde Society Quarterly Journal*, vol. 41, no. 4 (winter 2008).

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## SETTLING IN: WOODFORDE'S FIRST THREE YEARS IN NORFOLK

The biggest, most unsettling change in Parson Woodforde's quiet life was undoubtedly his move to Norfolk in 1776. The question readers of his celebrated diary invariably ask is how difficult was the adjustment from his previous life in Somerset and Oxford to an incumbency in remote, rural Norfolk. Opinions amongst Woodforde scholars vary. Beresford, in his pioneering editing of the diary in the inter-war years gives the impression, from a reading of his selective and abbreviated entries in the first three years of the Norfolk edition of the diary, that it was relatively easy. Winstanley, seldom in agreement with any of Beresford's views, from his daunting task of editing the complete diary to 1787, maintains that Woodforde's assimilation into Norfolk 'wasn't painless:<sup>1</sup> the breakneck speed with which the weeks and months fly past in Beresford's first volume, the scrappiness of the bits and pieces selected, give a very misleading picture. They give the wholly wrong impression that Woodforde's acclimatisation, and full acceptance by the Norfolk people, already a closely-knit group of friends, happened more simply and easily, as well as faster than it did in reality'. Only after about three years did he achieve

contentment with his lot so far as his buttoned-up personality allowed. In the introduction to the diary entries of Woodforde's Oxford years, Hargreaves-Mawdsley sees the diarist as 'not altogether a happy man' and his acceptance of the Norfolk living 'looks very much as if he had impulsively seized upon Weston without really liking the idea.'<sup>2</sup>

Where does a balance lie? Growing up in an extensive Somerset family, Woodforde was immensely sociable. He always hated the thought of being on his own without company. Yet he seldom makes anything more than the briefest direct comment in his diary about his real feelings. A great deal has to be inferred from what is essentially an aide-memoire and a list of his expenditure made each day. Very seldom does he reveal the contents of the conversations he had on the innumerable times he enjoyed a morning call or dinner party. So far as it can be established from the daily entries in the diary, I think the truth about him establishing his roots in Norfolk is to be found in an examination of three aspects that the complete edition of the diary allows. First, an assessment of what Woodforde was leaving behind in Somerset and Oxford and how strongly he felt the pull of both places. Secondly, how much did he enjoy setting up a well-run bachelor establishment in Weston and, lastly, how readily did he find acceptance as a newcomer in benighted Norfolk and quickly establish a network of friends.

Leaving Oxford was not difficult. Woodforde's two year stint there in 1773-5 as a senior fellow of New College, his term as sub-warden and as a university proctor had the sole aim of his securing a comfortable clerical living. There was never a question, as an alternative, of his continuing an Oxford existence. Success in the venture, for he had no other patronage connections, was an essential part of his plan to support any thought of marriage and family life with Betsy White, a local Somerset girl. That came to nothing as Woodforde was famously a dilatory, unsuccessful suitor. In college, waiting his turn, he secured in December 1774 Weston Longville, one of the college's most handsome livings with its minimum income of £300 a year. Once that had been achieved in December, and he had been granted the customary year of grace before taking up residence, the Norfolk die was cast. Even so, he made no great haste to take up his living until late May 1776. Yet

any vague notion of waiting for a West Country living to turn up was a non-starter. Hargreaves-Mawdsley reckons that what Woodforde most enjoyed about his spell as a senior fellow was the good living (to the extent of suggesting he had a serious drink problem) which he had a strong hand in maintaining.<sup>3</sup> Proud of his Oxford career and the status it gave him, Woodforde gives no indication of any nostalgia about his years there or any attempt to maintain any serious link with his old college. The break was easy enough. That with his Somerset roots was a different matter.

It is easy to forget, given the heavy stress on the diarist's Norfolk years before the Parson Woodforde Society's complete edition was published, that Woodforde's Somerset roots, at least on his mother's side, ran centuries deep. An unimaginative man, set in his ways from an early stage, he would never for a moment have considered severing them if his automatic succession to his father's Ansford living had not been snatched away from him by his uncle Tom's devious machinations to secure it for his son Frank.<sup>4</sup> This caused a terrible rift in the close-knit extended family that was so numerous in the village and district. Family life with its constant social round was the very core of the diarist's existence, fixing the parameters of his modest ambitions. Woodforde was devastated at the outcome of his uncle's chicanery. Securing another living through his old college became essential.

But there were other irritants in the family that Woodforde reflected upon. His relationship with his two brothers had been difficult for close on a decade. Woodforde's father had planned rewarding professional careers for all three of his sons: James in the church; Heighes, the eldest, was trained as an attorney; John, the youngest, served an apprenticeship with a Bristol merchant. Neither of James's brothers achieved success in their callings; both of them turned to drink. Heighes made a dysfunctional marriage. With little income and left with four children to support he was constantly dunning the diarist for cash. At New Year 1782, niece Nancy, now residing at Weston with her uncle, wrote to her father in reply to two begging letters to her uncle (he refusing to write to his brother): 'He says that he has done a great deal for your Family and as much he shall do so and Likewise says that he never will be brought to want by his relatives'.<sup>5</sup>

John's failure in Bristol and farming back in Ansford was compounded by frequent bouts of the heaviest drink binges during which he invariably became extremely quarrelsome and foul mouthed. When, serving as his ailing father's curate in Ansford and Castle Cary, Woodforde lived for half a dozen years with his brothers, their bachelor establishment became notorious. It had the name, deeply troubling for their conventional brother guarding the reputation of both his calling and family, of being 'the worst house in the Parish or any other Parish'.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, the thought of escaping this side of life in Somerset, with its embers of fraternal jealousy, and the constant reminder of his uncle's duplicity was indeed welcome. On the other hand, Woodforde's incumbency at Weston was marked by his regular return to Somerset every three years or so until his last protracted illness. With the long and arduous journey, long stays of three or four months were usual. Does this suggest that he could never put behind him a constant musing for the lost life in the all-embracing community of his youth? There is no doubt that he enjoyed these return visits to his family with its constant round of dinners, visits and fishing expeditions but that he was increasingly delighted to be back home in Norfolk and ready to take up his regular diary of morning calls, dinners, the welcome of friends and the management of his household.

Though never directly stated, there are clear indications that he was not misty-eyed about the past. When he dreamt of Ansford two nights in a row, they were not roseate recollections but of 'very dismal things happening at Ansford'.<sup>7</sup> And on his first return visit in the summer of 1777 he was immediately reminded how necessary it had been for him to leave. On his first day back, 'Brother John came... in the Evening quite merry and behaved most intolerably – tho' the first Time of seeing him – When he went away which was very soon he said Damn ye all – pretty warm Reception'.<sup>8</sup> A few days later, Woodforde was not invited to the grand family christening of the child of Frank Woodford recently settled in the rectory. It was just as well. Brother John behaved as usual: 'being merry disturbed the company so much they were obliged to break up about 11. o'clock – Js. Clarke and Jack were about to fight – He made terrible work there I heard this morning – He is the worst Company I ever was in in my Life when he is got merry – Nothing pleases him then but making the

whole Company uneasy'.<sup>9</sup> Things were no different two years later when Woodforde returned to make arrangements for his niece Nancy's coming to Norfolk to live with him as companion. At a large family party, Brother John, 'was very disagreeable – being drunk – and was going to fight with James Clarke & swore abominably – It was 12 o'clock before we got to bed being so much disturbed – I pity his wife much.'<sup>10</sup> On the same visit, staying with his family was not so enjoyable that he could not leave it behind to enjoy on his own four days in fashionable Weymouth and, three weeks later, four days in Bath and Bristol, perhaps with thoughts of nocturnal pleasures.

Nancy succinctly summarises the bitterness of all these family conflicts which Woodforde never directly states in his diary. In a letter to her sister in November 1783 she writes that her uncle 'seems to like Norfolk better than ever' whereas she would love them to return to Somerset. But it was out of the question: 'I can't wish him to live in Ansford as that Place is extremely disagreeable to him'.<sup>11</sup>

The second reason Woodforde was determined to settle easily in Norfolk was his intention from the outset to set up a comfortable, well-run home. Ever since the days of his Babcary curacy, a dozen years earlier, he had shown his household management skills. They had given him quiet enjoyment. Male establishments of bachelors and widowers were numerous amongst the professional – especially amongst the clergy with their long years of Oxbridge celibacy – and larger farming communities. They are an unchartered aspect of eighteenth century social history to which Woodforde's diary gives unrivalled access.

At Weston Rectory he was able to give these skills full reign. His income of a good £300 a year had increased six-fold from the days of his curacies. Moreover, he borrowed some £850 in his first two years at Weston, principally in Somerset on the security of his various small properties there. He also received £115 in settlement of his dilapidations dispute with his predecessor's widow, Mrs. Gloster Ridley.<sup>12</sup>

At first sight, the rectory house itself was not the ideal candidate for smart refurbishment. Woodforde, on his first short visit in April 1775 found his 'House and living ...a very good one indeed...the New Building (added to the 'vilest Thatched Hovel' by his

predecessor in around 1740) which is very good'.<sup>13</sup> No drawing of Woodforde's rectory survives, surprisingly since his nephew, the artist Samuel Woodforde R.A., visited on several occasions. Wasn't it sufficiently picturesque? The general consensus, however, seems to have been that it nowhere matched those spacious, well-planned new rectories which reflected the increasing wealth and status of the Georgian clergy, enjoying, through their tithe incomes, the fruits of agricultural improvement. Certainly, it didn't compare with Berries Hall, the home of Mr Du Quesne, with his three livings and three prebendal stalls or with the rectory at Sparham, which he first visited in April 1779 where Mr Athill 'has a noble House ... he built his House himself and it cost 1000 pound'.<sup>14</sup>

The rectory at Weston was always somewhat cramped. There were insufficient bedrooms when members of his family came to stay for months on end; there was no separately designated dining room; there was a constant shuffling between the 'great' parlour and the study (a general purpose room); the chimneys of both rooms smoked insufferably; the thatch and clay-lump of the service quarters needed regular attention; high winds were enormously feared.<sup>15</sup> All these deficiencies were, of course, addressed when the new late-Georgian style rectory, Trollopian in its scale, was built in the early 1840s.

Yet from the outset Woodforde was determined to enjoy the improvement of his rectory so that it realised his dreams of domestic comfort and a well-managed household. This was extremely important to him in settling in Norfolk. Its status would also fix his place as a newcomer in the village and with the neighbouring gentry and clerical communities. Activity was at breakneck speed. He had brought with him fourteen boxes from Ansford, containing chiefly linen, books, pictures and silver. These weighed three-quarters of a ton and cost him £5 5s.11d. in carriage.<sup>16</sup> Transporting furniture across the country, with such high rates of land carriage, was out of the question. He had also bought undisclosed goods in the rectory valued at £38 2s. 9d. from Mrs. Ridley.

The evidence suggests he furnished the rectory in style. Within a week of arriving in Weston, before he had unpacked his boxes, he had attended a house sale in Norwich. His spirits were lifted, '(it) is

the finest City in England by far' he enthused and he spent accordingly on a three-day shopping spree with his nephew and servant. He spent over £8 on some silver at a 'toy' shop adjoining the King's Head and then walked up to the house-sale, something he always enjoyed, of a young gentleman in fashionable St Giles Street who had lived beyond his means. There, after grumbling about the high prices on the first day, he spent £23 15s. 6p. on furniture and silver including eight good dining chairs at 15s. each and a large salver for £12 5s. 7d. plus 5gns. for a parlour fender from someone who had bought it earlier during the sale.<sup>17</sup>

As the most notable regional capital in England and a significant manufacturing centre, Norwich was well-placed to supply the needs of a growing and increasingly well-to-do middling sort: merchants, manufacturers, professionals and the more prosperous farmers and craftsmen. It boasted innumerable workshops, whose masters perused the latest London-produced design manuals and took on board those metropolitan shifts in taste as they percolated down to the provinces. The following day he gave Brookes, an upholsterer in White Lion Lane, a 'good' order including a bed (he settled his massive bill of £42 19s. for soft furnishings at the end of the year which included carpets, bed hangings and curtains for his chamber in 'Marine Saxe Blue') and spent £17 on six items, principally 9gns for a 'very handsome Mohogany (sic) wardrobe', from Edward Thorne in St. Stephen's Churchyard. A week later, all his various purchases were delivered: a 'Waggon load of Goods brought me from Norwich this morning, Mr. Thorne the Cabinet Maker came with them and he dined and spent the afternoon with us'.<sup>18</sup> A long case clock was ordered from Reepham for 6gns. and a good deal of china (he settled bills of £14 17s with him over the next two years) from William Beloe, china merchant in the Market Place. Woodforde was soon noting with satisfaction that he possessed a complete set of fashionable cream ware. A couple of months later, Thorne again dined when he accompanied a waggon with 'a Mohogany Beaurou (sic) & Bookcase with some new Mohogany Chairs and a Voider (a tray in which dirty dishes were stacked when clearing the table during a meal) & cheese-Plate of Mohogany'. Soon afterwards, Thorne's man Richard stayed for three days 'to put up my Shelves in the parlour'.<sup>19</sup> Within a few months the house

was more or less ship-shape. Over the years Woodforde acquired more furniture. In the early Spring of 1778 the two main rooms were hung with wallpaper by his upholsterer's man who stayed for three days. The parson had to eat in the kitchen along with his nephew, five servants, his paper-hanger, two gardeners, his carpenter and two masons busily white-washing other rooms in the house.<sup>20</sup>

This generous employment of labour to undertake the improvement of his rectory and garden was a feature especially of his first three years at Weston. As with his furnishing of the house it gave him quiet satisfaction. It also greatly aided his acceptance and standing in the village as, after the squire, he was probably its principal employer. Moreover, Woodforde, unlike so many clergymen who held multiple benefices and preferments and, as a result, employed poorly paid curates, resided in the village throughout the year.

At the core of the diarist's activities as an employer was his permanent staff. Within three months he had put together his household, his 'family' as he always called it: an upper and lower maid, a footman (whom he had brought with him from Somerset), a farming man to tend his 46 acres of glebe together with the New College land he rented, and a yard boy. Although there was a fair turnover of maids initially, its size remained unchanged during Woodforde's twenty-six year-long incumbency. In addition there was a good deal of casual labour employed, some of it skilled, especially in the early years, when it was necessary to extensively repair the house, farm buildings and resurrect a sizeable garden.

Again action was immediate and undertaken enthusiastically. Within a week of his arrival, Hardy, the mason, and his boy were fixing the hearths in the two front rooms and a rat catcher employed. A fortnight later, he was paying two masons, a carpenter and two labourers by the week. In the middle of the following month he noted excitedly '14 People at work for me today besides a Cart and a Man with it – 15 in all – 4 about the great pond – 2 Masons with their Men – 3 Labourers – 2 Men cutting down Trees – 1 Carpenter – 1 Carter'.<sup>21</sup> Although no details are given of the repairs and alterations made, it is clear the rectory and farm buildings were soon put in order. A set of seven new gates smartened the appearance of both. In 1780, shortly after she had come to live at Weston, his niece Nancy was writing, 'My uncle has expended a great deal of Money

here this Summer in building and repairs he seems to like Norfolk better than ever ... I often expostulate with him spending so much Money here but to no purpose he says he will have things convenient and agreeable to himself'.<sup>22</sup>

He set about the garden with the same avidity as with the house itself.<sup>23</sup> From the outset he had a vision of making his 'great pond' a fine prospect. A major project, it required dredging, extending, deepening and its banks refashioning. In mid-June 1776, he was so immersed in his scheme for its improvement that, '(nephew) Bill and myself Busy about the great Pond all Day – We got up this morning early – 6 o'clock.' On the 30th July there was a full eclipse of the moon from 10.15pm to 1.30am. Too wound-up to sleep, when it was over, he 'went out and worked at the great Pond till after 3 o'clock'.<sup>24</sup> To get its levels and banks right and provide the optimum conditions to stock it with a variety of fish were constant preoccupations for the diarist in these early years. All this was labour intensive. At one stage, he was hiring an 'engine' - a highly dangerous contraption which almost killed his footman in full view of the dinner guests who had come early to witness its dredging properties – that required four men to operate it.<sup>25</sup>

In his first Spring at Weston, he could put into practice his undoubted gardening skills. Trees were grubbed up, others, particularly a large number of Scotch firs and larch (on one occasion he bought 50 saplings) then in high fashion, were planted to provide some cover from the bitter east winds which delayed Spring most years in Norfolk. To this purpose he bought in the village 20 yards of box hedge, some of it nine feet high to provide some shelter in the kitchen garden he was setting out. Whether it flourished, something the parson was doubtful about, is not recorded. The establishment of an apple orchard was a firmer bet.<sup>26</sup>

Woodforde's biggest gardening venture was the construction of a walled kitchen garden. These were the *sine qua non* of any Georgian country house. Whether they were usual features of the average rectory in the 1770s is uncertain. He clearly had plans for a walled garden from the outset. In the summer of 1776 he paid Dade, the Hockering brick-maker £9 12s. (red bricks were around 9s. per thousand).<sup>27</sup> Whether this large quantity of bricks (neither price, nor quantities, nor carriage are noted) was used on the house, farm

buildings or a kitchen garden wall is unclear. Certainly, later that first year, Woodforde, dissatisfied with the quality of the Hockering bricks, agreed to buy 40,000 used bricks from Great Witchingham Hall. Over a fortnight, in the teeth of fearful February weather, he organised teams of waggons from his neighbouring farmers to bring them home.<sup>28</sup> The carters were plied with rum and one day there were eleven to dinner including his own servants. His mason Hardy and his boy cleaned the bricks before they were used to construct a walled kitchen garden. In the later diary he often refers to his 'walled garden'. Early purchases to stock it were 90 gooseberry and currant bushes: vines, apricots and figs were added once its walls provided the necessary protection. A variety of shrubs were set out. Woodforde was delighted with the result: the garden was always shown with pride to visitors. In 1780 he erected a small temple, embellished with his borrowed armorial bearings, where he could enjoy a pipe on a warm summer's day.<sup>29</sup> He must have counted his blessings, delighted with the comforts the good living of Weston had brought him.

Through his total involvement in improving the house and garden and various pieces of work at the church, Woodforde's generous employment of labour was doubly rewarding. From the outset, it gave him a good name in the village as a fair and regular employer. Concern for the welfare of his workforce was evident; welcome meals were often given in the rectory kitchen. Beer allowances were generous. In September 1778, in a general cutting down mood, he calculated that he had brewed, since last Michaelmas, 1600 gallons of beer, 'My workmen would not have drunk less than 5 Pints of Beer each Man (per day), my Allowance was only 3'.<sup>30</sup>

And on some days, in what must have been seen as rare treats in the dull routine of the rural calendar, villagers took part in the parson's regular coursing and fishing expeditions, such as when he took five of them, besides his own two servant men, to help with the nets, all well plied with food and beer, on a long June day's major fishing jaunt to the river Wensum.<sup>31</sup> From the outset, Woodforde's entertainment of a score of farmers to dinner at the rectory, John Bull mode, with copious amounts of beer (and spirits), beef and plumb pudding on tithe payment day and the invitation to dinner on Christmas day of half a dozen old men were regular dates in the

village year. This was an old, kinder, more leisurely world, one which was soon to be rapidly supplanted by one in which the gap between master and man widened, a change, which as William Cobbett stressed, did not evade the clerical class.

When it comes to looking at the third reason why Woodforde settled easily into his Norfolk living, the evidence is a little more ambiguous. Much of it is centred on his eighteen-year old nephew, Bill. Bringing him to Norfolk in 1776 was a last minute decision. His father, the feckless Heighes, had not sought out any regular career for him and his uncle, getting him away from his dysfunctional family by kindly providing him with a home for a couple of years, had no constructive plans either. Without friends of his age, he became bored and frequently truculent. Those friends that his uncle soon made were clerics of another generation. Sometimes Woodforde took him on visits to them, often he was left at home. The diarist despaired: 'My Nephew behaved very rude in our coming home from Mr Donnes – The more he is out the worse he behaves'.<sup>32</sup> Days went by when they did not speak to each other. On one very hot August day, 'he (Bill) got up this morning at 4 o'clock and took a long walk by himself to Mounsley (Mundesley) 7 or 8 miles from North Walsham close to the Sea and return'd back to Weston a little after 9 in the Evening. It must be near 50 Miles that he walked this Day. He brought home a fine piece of Sea Weed and some Star Fish etc'.<sup>33</sup>

Bill's long fraught plans to join the Navy were not aided by his uncle's stubborn refusal to find the necessary £60 to fund his entry. Unsurprisingly, with nothing useful to do, he got into a serious scrape with a pretty young maid at the rectory, an escapade that was in danger of badly damaging the parson's reputation. Yet even when the relationship was at its lowest ebb and Woodforde was 'very uneasy and very unhappy' he wrote, 'when Bill goes away I shall have no one to converse with – quite without a Friend'.<sup>34</sup> Hating to be on his own, he presumably meant that he was left without a companion at the rectory for he already enjoyed a good network of clerical friends. But there was an amusing side to the uncle-nephew relationship. Staying at the King's Head, they were invited to supper with Mr Francis Senr., the Norwich attorney in Surrey Street, not the most scintillating entertainment for a

twenty-year old youth. Bill did not turn up: 'I apprehend he was after the Town Ladies.' After supper, he 'took a walk in Pursuit of Bill but he was got to the inn.'<sup>35</sup> Then matters came quickly to a head. Four days later, Bill disclosed he had gonorrhoea. Woodforde was ill with worry; they were barely on speaking terms. He himself felt he had, 'the old Pain once again in the private Parts. I never was so low scarce in my Life as this Evening'.<sup>36</sup> Too much should not be read into this and similar occasions, usually associated with Bill, when he recorded that he was feeling low. They should not be taken to mean that he was in any way disenchanted with his move to Norfolk, simply that he had made a bad error in bringing his nephew with him as companion in the first place. When, to his immense relief getting shot of Bill in December 1778, with firm instructions not to return to Weston, a cloud lifted.

Nor should too much be read into the dilapidation's case concerning the rectory with the widow of Woodforde's predecessor, Mrs. Ridley.<sup>37</sup> In no way did its resolution affect his ready acceptance in Norfolk. Living in London, she used her old friends, Mr Howes, who had acted as curate in Weston in her husband's frequent absences, and the ubiquitous Mr Du Quesne of neighbouring Honingham, as intermediaries. Woodforde had already met Mr Howes the previous year; he was playing bowls with Mr Du Quesne three weeks after he had arrived. Both were very friendly from the outset. Such cases as dilapidations in the eighteenth century were not quickly resolved in the case of dispute. Woodforde must have known this, but, perhaps financially a little pressed before his first tithe payments were due, he seems to have pressed both clerics too hard to settle the matter in his favour quickly. Mr Howes, impossible to chivvy, was never speedy in dealing with accounts; Mr Du Quesne was away taking up his St David's canonry for a couple of months. Woodforde had the good advice of the two Francis, the leading Norwich attorneys, who looked after New College business in Norfolk and with whom he set up a good working relationship. Patience was all that was required. Within six months the matter was resolved in Woodforde's favour. The diarist could be thin-skinned in his relationships, easily ready to take offence. In this instance it was no more than a fortnight's brief standoff involving two turned down invitations to dinner. Once the

matter was settled the two friendships could continue to develop. Unsurprisingly, Woodforde's early friendships were with the neighbouring clergy, men of equal standing, education and interests. Roy Winstanley, from the evidence of the entertainments provided and attended by Woodforde and his family, made the point that the social gap between the clergy and farming communities, was wider in Norfolk than in Somerset.<sup>38</sup> Nancy, settling into life in Weston in 1780, gives credence to this observation: 'we live in a very genteel manner ... we have not been above a Week this Summer without company or going out our Neighbourhood is being increased ... our visiting is all in such a high Style that I cannot say it's perfectly agreeable to me'.<sup>39</sup> Certainly, Woodforde and the farmers in his parish were never on equal visiting terms. They were invited to the rectory for the annual tithe dinner, they met on occasional parish business and tasks in the farming year; they formed the bulk of the 'large' congregations he often noted with pleasure in his first years at Weston. What looked like an early friendly acquaintanceship with the farmer John Bowles, not aided by his serious, soon fatal, drink problem, never developed. There was a regular exchange of visits and dinners between the parson and the Kerrs of Frans Green. In late January, early February 1779 he met them at various dinner parties five times within a fortnight. If they were farmers, however, they were distinctly of the gentleman variety, friends also of the Howes, Press Custance and the Mattishall gentry, the Hewitts, Bodhams and Donnes. On one occasion he noted, unusually, perhaps thinking they were getting a little above their station, 'Dinner and Supper served up in Chelsea Dishes and Plates.'<sup>40</sup> Again it is impossible to know how their relationship would have developed. Mr Kerr's last appearance, one of the oddest in the diary, was with his wife and Press Custance's mistress when they called at the rectory in April 1781. Kerr who did not dismount 'talked very wildly and madly'. The next mention of him, eighteen months later, is of his death in the usual diarist's formula, 'I hope it will provide a happy change for him'.<sup>41</sup>

Woodforde's network of clerical friends fell quickly and easily into place. He was immediately invited to the Howes in neighbouring Hockering. George Howes, who had acted as his curate during his long period of grace before he took up the Weston living, was a

member of a South Norfolk minor gentry family.<sup>42</sup> Belonging to a previous generation, several times married, he was somewhat eccentric, never entirely predictable. The third Mrs Howes was equally warm in welcoming Woodforde into the neighbourhood. Her niece, the charming young widow, Mrs Davy, who frequently stayed at Hockering and later featured so prominently in the diary, was an added attraction that drew both Woodforde and Bill to the Howes.

Within a few days of arriving at Weston, the Howes had invited Mr Du Quesne to meet him at dinner, 'We played at Quadrille most part of the Afternoon – I spent a very agreeable day there'.<sup>43</sup> Again, Du Quesne was of an earlier generation. Well connected, as a cousin and protégé of the Townshends of Honingham, he seemed to know everyone. He was immensely sociable, for long belying his years, he gave a constant round of dinners; he was musical, playing the violin, loved coursing, playing bowls and a game of cards. Almost every dinner ended with a game of quadrille, whist or some game of cards, recreations the diarist greatly enjoyed and which must have greatly eased his acceptance. The immediate, warm friendship between Woodforde and Du Quesne never wavered. And the diarist from the earliest days invited his new friends back to Weston to share the entertainments he took such care and pleasure in providing.

Woodforde must have passed the social tests of admission to the clerical society of his neighbourhood with ease for in New Year 1777 he was invited to join a 'Rotation', a form of club very popular in the eighteenth century. This was a small group of clerics, Howes, Du Quesne and Castres Donne, the curate of neighbouring Mattishall, who met to dine each week on a strictly rotating basis in each other's houses. Castres (named after an uncle who was envoy to the King of Portugal at the time of the great Lisbon earthquake in 1755) Donne was in some ways the most interesting member of the quartet.<sup>44</sup> Five years younger than Woodforde, the diarist found him immediately welcoming. He had been ordained deacon and appointed curate shortly before Woodforde accepted the Weston living. He came from good clerical stock; an uncle was a doctor in Dereham, a cousin one of the three founding surgeons of the new Norwich hospital, another was the poet William Cowper. But

Castres had never been to university, instead working as a clerk, after probably serving an apprenticeship, with John Patteson Senr., a leading master weaver, merchant and mayor, who drove a large export trade of Norwich worsteds with Germany and Italy. Castres spent two years in Germany with the firm in the late 1760s, at one point keeping an eye on Patteson's thirteen-year old nephew and heir, John, who was learning German and gaining an insight into the export trade in Leipzig. He was lively, generous and sociable, knew everyone in Norwich and brought a welcome breadth to the clerical club. He also had a sister, Anne, who was drawn into the Rotation. Her tardy and nervous suitor, the well-to-do Thomas Bodham, a fellow of Caius College in minor orders (they eventually married after a decade's courtship) who also lived, very comfortably, in Mattishall, shortly afterwards became a member. After his ordination as priest, Castres quickly, through his patronage connections, found a living and curacy fifteen miles south of Norwich. There was a long round of farewell dinners stretching far into the night. The final one at the Donnes was a twelve hour affair, 'We were very merry tho' a parting Visit'.<sup>45</sup> Woodforde soon visited him at Broome, but it was really the end of a warm friendship. Living twenty-five miles away was an unbridgeable distance. Castres soon married and died young in 1789. Anne Bodham, now the mistress of South Green House and very welcoming to Nancy, became, with Mr Du Quesne, the Woodfordes' longest and most stalwart friends in Norfolk.

Heather Edwards maintains that Woodforde was so taken up with 'the renovation of the Parsonage ... and he had Bill for company and conversation' that he 'seems to have attached little importance to making friends in Norfolk'.<sup>46</sup> It seems a curious observation. Admittedly, there were other clerics besides the Rotation quartet whom he met during his first three years at Weston, for example, the Priests of Reepham, the Baldwins of Lyng, the Shelfords of North Tuddenham and Roger Hall, his Winchester near-contemporary who came to take up the living of Garveston in 1778. And friendship with them never developed like those with the four members of the Rotation. Dinners with them, from the outset, were frequently noted as being 'very merry' or 'very agreeable', brief comments which indicated, in the diarist's understated language,

his warmest, friendliest approval. They formed the core of his active social life.

Woodforde didn't make proper acquaintanceship with his squire, John Custance, and his wife until he had been at Weston for more than two years. The Custances were recently married, the bride Frances Beauchamp-Proctor a mere twenty years old. They lived in temporary accommodation at the Manor House in nearby Ringland while their fine new Weston House was being built. Through their thoughtfulness and Woodforde's immediate esteem for them a genuine, warm friendship developed. The best detailed example of an amicable squire-parson relationship, a key association in Georgian rural society, became the core of his existence. Again a constant round of dinners, teas, cards and morning calls developed. Only every now and then, after an especially formal dinner at the squire's, as when the Bishop dined, did he remind himself that he was more at home with his friends from the Rotation whom he had carefully nurtured during his first two years at Weston.<sup>47</sup> It was these friends, his 'family' at the rectory and those villagers whom he employed and cared about that made him 'like Norfolk better than ever'. Three days before his long journey to Somerset in May 1779, 'Mr Du Quesne, Mr and Mrs Howes, Mrs Davy, Mr Bodham and Mr Hall all dined & spent the afternoon with me. It was not my Rotation day but only to take leave of them as I go a journey on Monday into the West'. The day before he had dined at the Custances, and on Sunday he 'took my leave of them' at church.<sup>48</sup> Clearly, Woodforde had settled in.

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## WOODFORDE, MR PENNY AND THE DUKE OF BEAUFORT

I got to Petty France about 1 o'clock – I then took another Chaise to Tedbury – I went from Petty France to the Duke of Beaufort's at Badminton to call on Dr Penny as I had a Letter from his Brother..... but he was not at the Dukes, however I met him in the Dukes Park returning from his Living, he desired me to return to the Dukes to Dinner but I did not like it as all the family is there –

(*Diary*, 7 Oct. 1774)

Although this entry in Woodforde's diary is the only one to record a visit to Badminton, the home of the Dukes of Beaufort – sometimes spelt Badmington by the diarist – it is mentioned on a number of occasions, whilst the 5th Duke himself is referred to on many more. How did this connection come about? The answer is primarily, although not exclusively, due to Woodforde's friendship with Robert Penny of Castle Cary.

Robert, who Woodforde familiarly calls 'Robin', was the son of Robert, or 'Old Mr Penny' and his wife Sarah. Unlike his four

younger brothers – John, Caleb, James and Thomas – Robert Jnr’s baptism is not recorded either in the Cary registers or those of Milborne Port, his mother’s home village.<sup>1</sup> Foster’s *Alumni Oxoniensis* states that he matriculated from Oriel at the age of 19 in March 1751 which suggests that he was probably born in 1732. He took his BA degree in 1755 and MA in 1757 when he became a Fellow of Oriel and he was still in residence the following year when on 8 May Woodforde himself matriculated from the same college. Whether, as Hargreaves-Mawdsley suggests, Penny took the younger man ‘under his wing’ we cannot be sure, as Woodforde had not yet begun to keep the Diary, but it seems likely, at least until he migrated to New College in the following year.<sup>2</sup> What is sure is that they always seem to have been on excellent terms.

Robert Penny’s name appears in the Diary as early as 29 September 1759 when ‘I dined with Mr Penny at South Town’, which is to say South Cary. This would have been Mr Robert Penny Jnr as his father is always called ‘Old Mr Penny’ by Woodforde. This was just two days before Woodforde set off for his first New College term when he carried with him Robert’s gold watch to be mended by an Oxford watchmaker. Not always being in residence at the same time, the two men tended to act as post boys and delivery men for one another. Thus on 27 February 1760 –

Had a Letter from my Father by Mr Penny  
who is come up to be ordained for Priests Orders

and on 28 June 1763 when Woodforde ‘Had a Letter from Mr Penny of Castle Cary desiring me to send him a Wig and some Shoes’.

By this time Penny had left the University whilst retaining his fellowship, and was acting as Samuel Woodforde’s curate in his home town. In September of the previous year James was himself at home and went with his mother to Castle Cary church, where she had not been ‘this many a year’ and they heard ‘a very good sermon from Mr Penny’.<sup>3</sup>

In April of 1766 Old Mr Penny died. By now Woodforde himself had been ordained priest and it was he who conducted the funeral service; the chief townfolk – Mr Melliar, Mr Creed, Uncle Tom etc. – being pall-bearers. This must have done much to cement the relationship between James and Robert. But good friends as they

were to remain, it was certainly not as significant a relationship in Mr Penny's life as that with Henry Somerset who since 1756 had been 5th Duke of Beaufort. The Duke's father had been a dedicated champion of the University of Oxford<sup>4</sup> and he himself had been a gentleman-commoner at Oriel where he certainly must have met Penny. The first hint of the relationship in Woodforde's diary is probably the occasion in 1761 when he was visiting Robert in Cary and 'Mr Thomas Burge, Mr Robin and Mr John Penny, and myself went into Mr Penny's pantry and there eat.....some Venison Pasty'. The venison may well have been a gift from the ducal estate – Badminton.

The chief source of venison was the deer parks of the large landed estates. It was much prized and as E. P. Thompson says, 'Its consumption was a sign of status, and the gift of game was one of the more delicate means by which the gentry expressed influence and solicited favour. Venison was the most expressive of all such gifts'.<sup>5</sup> That Badminton was a source of venison is confirmed by a diary entry on 13 April 1773. Woodforde records that he had been asked to dine the following day upon a haunch of venison and that –

Mr Robert Penny who came to Town the day before Yes=  
=terday, brought Mr Creed the Venison from the Duke of  
Beaufort –

And when that day came –

We had an exceeding fine Haunch of venison for  
Dinner on which I played a good Knife and Fork.

No records appear to exist showing when foxhounds were first kept at Badminton, although the Hunt website states that the longest pedigree for an individual hound dates back to 1743 – 59 generations. There is a story that one day in 1762 the 5th Duke was out with the staghounds and the pack gave chase to a fox, which thereafter became the preferred quarry.<sup>6</sup>

Mr Penny was able to bring the venison because, having briefly held the vicarage of Evercreech to which he had been instituted in May 1765, by March 1768 Woodforde learnt at Mrs Penny's that 'her son the Parson.... came into the country yesterday, from the Duke of Beaufort's where he is Chaplain to his Grace and lives with him'. He was to live at Badminton for the rest of his life, although a

number of other clerical things were also to come his way.

In 1770 we hear of the Beauforts spending a night at Ansford:

Mr Robin Penny made me a short morning Visit. The  
Duke & Duchess of Beaufort and Children who Mr Penny  
is with most Part of the Time are all to sleep at Ansford Inn  
To night it being their Road from Weymouth to Badmington –  
(4 Oct. 1770)

Doubtless it was Penny who recommended the Ansford Inn as being suitably comfortable for the ducal party. Further evidence that the Ansford Inn was fit for a duke came on 8 July 1773 when, the diarist records, ‘the Duke & Dutchess of Kingston slept at Ansford Inn’.

Whilst Woodforde and Penny always appear to have got on well, there was an occasion in 1772 when the two men found themselves on opposing sides, and again the Duke of Beaufort was involved. In the summer of that year the chancellor of their university, Lord Lichfield, was seen to be in a decline and the university’s politicians had immediately set about sounding out likely candidates to fill Lichfield’s shoes and canvassing for those who came forward.

Whilst national politics in the eighteenth century were a good deal more complex than the simple Tory/Whig dichotomy would suggest, those of the university were more intricate still, seeing as they did ‘the intermingling of disputes about first principles with the issues of the parish pump, the interaction of the high politics of London with collegiate squabbles, and not least the University’s long period in the political wilderness’.<sup>7</sup> This last a reference to the Tory university’s long period of suffering during the half century of Whig supremacy at Westminster.

Earlier in the century Oxford had been a hot-bed of Jacobitism ( we recall that Woodforde’s father had given his first-born the names Clementina Sobieski, the names of the Old Pretender’s wife, and, then, of course there was James!)<sup>8</sup> but such lingering support for that cause as remained by the 1770s was confined to a small romantic fringe. This did not mean that the Hanoverian monarchy now attracted universal enthusiasm, however, and dependence on Crown patronage was often regarded with suspicion. The Church itself, into which a majority of the university’s graduates went, was similarly divided between the bench of bishops, appointed by the

Crown with the approval of Whig ministers, and the predominantly Tory, lower clergy owing their livings to their colleges and country 'independents'.

Things, however, were changing and since January 1770 the ministry had been Tory, led by Lord North, so that the traditional 'Old Interest' opposition to the ministry was now likely to be fragmented. What is more, Lichfield, although his Tory credentials were undisputed had made a point of stressing the University's loyalty to the new King and, in Paul Langford's words, 'Many parched mouths in college and parsonage watered at the prospect of royal chaplaincies, canonries and livings suddenly open to Tory, High Church, Oxford men'.<sup>9</sup>

There was also a perhaps rather surprising parochialism about the University's electorate. It preferred its Chancellor to have an estate near-at-hand. Lord Lichfield was typical; he lived at Ditchley, near Chipping Norton. By the time he died on 19 September, there were four candidates in the field. The 'New interest' preference was none other than the prime minister himself, who was not only a Tory but a graduate of Trinity, and MP for Banbury, near to which was his family home, Wroxham Abbey.

'Old interest' had produced three candidates. The local magnate Lord Abingdon quickly dropped out of the contest leaving Jacob Pleydell-Bouverie, 2nd Earl of Radnor, of Coleshill, then in Berkshire although now in Oxfordshire, a graduate of University College but whose chief support lay in New College, and Henry Somerset, 5th Duke of Beaufort who was, as we know, a graduate of Oriel.

The date of the election was set for 3 October and on 25 September Woodforde was in receipt of a letter 'from Master Snr of New Coll: to let me know that lord Lichfield our Chancellor was dead and that there would be an Election of a new one in his Room....and therefore desires me to be present at it'. Accordingly, two days prior to the election he set off and the next day, having spent the night at Everleigh on Salisbury Plain, we find he is just one of a stream of MAs heading for their alma mater –

Going from Hungerford to Farnborough I overtook  
the four following Gentlemen, Stockwell of C.C. College,

Maud Chaplain of C.C. Coll: Boys and Bowls both  
Fellows of Trinity Coll: who were all going to Oxon  
to the Election.

Stockwell, Maud and 'myself' were for Lord Radnor, Boys and Bowls for Lord North.

Having reached Oxford and put up at the crowded Blue Boar, Woodforde, together with Stockwell and Maud, made his way to a meeting of Lord Radnor's friends, chaired by the Warden of New College, John Oglander. However, by eleven in the evening when the meeting broke up it had been decided 'to drop all thoughts of Ld Radnor as we could raise no more than 73'. Nor was Beaufort acceptable to the Earl's supporters, probably because having been Master of the Horse to the Queen, he had, what the Vice-Chancellor, Nathan Wetherell, described as 'some particles of *Dependence* still about him'.<sup>10</sup> During the course of the evening contact had been made with the Duke's supporters, meeting at the Mitre, but they 'would not come over to us'. Both meetings therefore declared that there was to be 'an Unanimous Election to Ld North'.

The following morning the election duly took place in the Convocation House, described in great and breathless detail in the Diary. Lord North was made a Doctor of Law and proclaimed Chancellor. Of the people Woodforde mentions as having been among the crowds in the Convocation House was Mr Penny who would, of course, have been in Oxford to support his patron the Duke. Happily, whatever the irreconcilable differences there may have been between them over the election, it had no effect upon the personal relationship between the two men.

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On New Year's Day 1773 James Woodforde was again a beneficiary of the Duke of Beaufort's largesse. He dined, probably at Clanville, with Robert's brother Caleb and his wife, having earlier in the day baptised two of their children, Frances and Robert –

We had a boiled Turkey & Oyster Sauce, and a Haunch of Venison rosted for Dinner with many other things – Mr Rob<sup>l</sup> Penny sent his Brother the haunch of Venison from the Duke of Beaufort's on the Occasion.

The following February Robert was back in Castle Cary. On the 12th Woodforde, his father and sister, together with Parson Penny, dined at Mr Creed's upon 'a fine Hare' and then on St Valentine's Day, a Sunday, Penny was at Cary Church to hear Woodforde read prayers and preach. On the next day we read that the two clergymen drank tea with Dr Clarke and that –

Parson Penny goes to Morrow to London to the Duke  
he takes Badminton in his Road – the Duchess has laid in.

The Duchess, Elizabeth (née Boscawen, daughter of the Admiral and hero of Louisburg) had in fact given birth on the 11th to Lady Elizabeth, the fifth of what were to be the couple's thirteen children.

On the 19 July that summer Woodforde received the very unwelcome message from his Cousin Frank – 'not only unkind but very ungentlemanlike' – that he intended serving the church of Ansford, thereby giving notice that James's curacy was terminated. He made up his mind to return to Oxford so that he would be on hand to hear news when a suitable New College living became available. It may have been some consolation to him to learn from Penny, less than a month later, that 'He is going to College as well as myself at Michaelmas to take an office upon him at Oriel College as the Duke of Beaufort is going to lodge in Oxfordshire'.

It was not, in fact, until the 14 December that Woodforde left Ansford Parsonage, 'rather dejected', to take up residence once more at New College. A week later he 'went to Chapel this Evening and took my Place there as Sub-Warden' (21/12/1773) and there he will have seen the Carracci School painting of the Nativity which had been presented to the College earlier in the year by Lord Radnor, perhaps as a reward for that society's support in the election of the previous year.<sup>11</sup>

It was in the New Year before the new Sub-Warden met his Cary friend. Together with Nathaniel Bliss, he went to Oriel, 'supped and spent the Evening in the Common Room' and

We had a Barrell of Colchester Oysters for Supper  
& which were sent to Penny from London by the Duke  
of Beaufort.

(Diary, 28 Jan. 1774)

Penny's name thereafter rarely occurs in the Diary without being linked to that of the Duke which Woodforde perhaps thought gave *him* some reflected distinction. When he again met the Duke's Chaplain at Oriel (11 May) he records that he was 'lately returned from Town from the Duke', and when back at Castle Cary in September, he meets Dr Penny at Mr Creed's and notes that he 'goes again to Morrow to the Duke's'.

Then in October we find the entry quoted at the beginning of this essay when Woodforde himself goes to Badminton and meets Penny 'returning from his living'. Since 1769 in addition to being the Duke's chaplain he had been rector of Woolaston with Alvington, near Lydney, and earlier in 1774 he had also become rector of the Oriel living of Cromhall. The former, whilst still in Gloucestershire was at a considerable distance being on the opposite side of the Severn estuary, so that the probability must be that the 'living' to which Woodforde refers was Cromhall, just 12 miles north-west of Badminton.

In the course of his career in the Church Robert Penny was to become a pluralist in quite a significant way. Whilst he gave up Woolaston in 1782, he added three Welsh rectories in the 1790s – Crickhowell, and Llanfihangel Cwm Du, both in Brecknockshire, in 1794, and Mitchel Troy with Cwmcarnan, in Monmouthshire, two years later. It can be no coincidence that the Duke of Beaufort was Lord-Lieutenant of both of these counties and what John Byng (Lord Torrington) refers to as the 'grand possessor of antiquities [such] as Tintern Abbey, Chepstow and Ragland [sic] Castles'.<sup>12</sup> Raglan Castle had been slighted by Parliamentary troops during the Civil War and with the Restoration the first Duke of Beaufort established Troy House as the family's Monmouthshire seat.<sup>13</sup>

Although Robert Penny was not the incumbent at St Michael and All Angels, Great Badminton, the parish church adjoining the House, it would have been surprising, given his friendly relationship with the Duke, if he did not play some part in the rebuilding of the church which took place in the 1780s. Terry Friedman describes the new church as 'spacious and well-lit' and 'intended to direct the eye to Michael Rysbrack's grand figurative tombs'.<sup>14</sup> In 1799 these monuments were joined by that to Duchess Elizabeth and, four years later, by that to the fifth Duke ('As a

husband, father, friend and Christian he was beloved, esteemed revered'), who thus predeceased Robert Penny who then became domestic chaplain to the 6th Duke, Henry Charles.

After Woodforde's move to Norfolk, he saw little of Penny but the few occasions when his visits to the south-west coincided with his friend being at Cary seem to have found him in good health and spirits –

Dr Penny of Castle Cary spent the Afternoon with us [at Cole], he hearty and well – I was very glad to see him –

He still lives with the Duke of Beaufort at Badminton

*(Diary, 1 June 1782)*

Dr Penny from Badminton the Duke of Beaufort's and Nephew Robert drank Coffee & Tea with us [at Ansford Parsonage] in the

Afternoon – He looked very jolly and well –

*(Diary, 16 Sept. 1795)*

This was during Woodforde's last visit to Somerset and a week later – on 24 September – the two friends met for the last time.

Penny's Nephew Robert was the son of his brother Caleb who Woodforde baptized together with his sister Frances<sup>15</sup> at Castle Cary on New Year's Day, 1773. Described as 'of Lincoln's Inn, Middx', he was to be the sole executor of his uncle's will. Dr Penny never married and Frances and Robert were to be the chief beneficiaries. In the original will made in 1806 Frances was to receive the very considerable sum of £1500 and Robert was to be the residuary legatee. Two codicils were later added. By the first Frances, who had in the meantime married the Revd Robert Greenwood of East Kennett, Wiltshire, was no longer to receive that lump sum 'within six Calendar months', instead it was to be given to two trustees – Thomas Bryan of Badminton and the Revd Edmund Gapper of Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, to be invested in Government securities. They were 'from time to time' to pay the dividends to Frances 'for her sole and separate use'. The second codicil gave to Robert two pieces of land at Torbay, Castle Cary, which the Doctor had purchased from the assigns of John Burge, Bankrupt' for £796. Other properties in Castle Cary – Cooper's Close and Oram Cottage – were to go to Caleb's widow and

Frances. The Revd Rees Thomas, curate of Lovington and South Barrow, was to receive £50 'for his constant friendly behaviour to me and all the family'.<sup>16</sup>

The second codicil was signed on 21 February 1809. According to the Great Badminton burial register 'The Revd Robert Penny D.D. Domestic Chaplain to his Grace the Duke of Beaufort died July 31<sup>st</sup> aged 78 years and buried August 5<sup>th</sup>'. Mr Winstanley discovered that his memorial in the church carried the following inscription:

Near this place  
Lie the remains of  
The Revd Rob<sup>t</sup> Penny, D.D.,  
Domestic chaplain to the late  
And present Duke of Beaufort  
Upwards of 42 years.  
He died on the 31<sup>st</sup> July 1809  
At whose particular request  
This plain tablet was erected  
By his grateful nephew

During a twentieth century restoration this wall-tablet was removed and, apparently, discarded by the restorers but it was subsequently rescued by a later incumbent and placed in the church porch.<sup>17</sup>

Sadly, part at least of Penny's will was to be frustrated. The name of Edmund Gapper, the trustee of the legacy bequeathed to Frances Greenwood, may have rung a bell with some readers. His father, also a clergyman and also Edmund, crops up quite frequently when Woodforde was curate at Babcary. Gapper Senior had on a number of occasions stepped in to substitute for James. Edmund, the son, also makes a brief, somewhat ignominious appearance. One day in November 1772, he and William Strangeways 'both of Charlton' had turned up at Ansford Parsonage and got 'exceeding drunk'. In 1778 he succeeded his father as rector of Keinton Mandeville but, alas for Penny's scheme, he died very shortly after the testator. A wall tablet in the church at Charlton Adam states that he 'died September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1809, aged 56', just seventeen days after probate had been granted on Penny's will in London.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, it may be that portraits still exist of both Dr Penny and his nephew, painted by none other than Samuel Woodforde RA. According to the Royal Academy's list of exhibitors, a 'Portrait of a

Clergyman (*Rev. Dr Penny*), painted by Woodforde, was exhibited in 1797, whilst in 1806 appears a painting of 'Mr Penny'.<sup>19</sup> How pleasing it would be if these were to come to light!

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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  4. W. R. Ward, *Georgian Oxford, University Politics in the Eighteenth Century*, 1958.
  5. E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters*, 1975.
  6. www.beauforthunt.com.
  7. Ward, *op. cit.*
  8. K. Solomon, *Jacobite Sympathies? A Note on Clementina Sobieski*, Journal XLII, 1.
  9. P. Langford, *A Polite and Commercial people: England, 1727–1783*, 1989.
  10. Quoted in Ward, *op. cit.*
  11. J. Buxton & P. Williams, *New College, 1379–1979*, 1979 – the picture is now in Hall.
  12. C. Bruyn Andrews (ed.), *The Torrington Diaries, Vol. 1*, 1934.
  13. C. Bruyn Andrews (ed.), *op. cit.*
  14. T. Friedman, *The Eighteenth Century Church in Britain*, 2011.
  15. In the *Diary* Vol. 4 the name is given as Francis but the Parish Register is clear – 'Frances Dau<sup>r</sup> of Caleb & Frances Penny'.
  16. PROB 11/1503.
  17. Winstanley, *op. cit.*
  18. B. Lawrence, *The Gappers and their Villages*, Journal XI, 1.
  19. Winstanley, *op. cit.*
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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Martin

You may remember me as a long-time committee member who had to resign because of increasing arthritis, but I still read the newsletters online from time to time. I was sorry to hear of the passing of Phyllis Stanley; I have very fond memories of her from the various committee meetings in the Friends' Meeting House, and on the many Frolics. She and I had a rather long breakfast on the Monday of the New College weekend, on a very hard bench in the dining hall, but the time passed so quickly because of her entertaining conversation about all thing Woodforde.

However, the one memory I have is at Committee when she tried to interest us in buying a collection of C18th gallstones. Dear Phyllis, she couldn't understand why we refused!

May her soul rest in peace.

Regards

Sue Cannell

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## LEAVES FROM AN UNWRITTEN JOURNAL

### **Part VII – The Swaffham Sisters (1804–1808)**

*Mary Barham Johnson inherited a great number of family papers and portraits which no doubt did much to inspire her keen interest in the lives of her forebears and, especially, in that of Anne Bodham. In 1984 she presented a copy of this unwritten journal to the History Group of the Mattishall Society. It was composed by Mary from a variety of sources, including Parson Woodforde's Diary and family letters and other papers and amounts to a most interesting biography of one of the Rotation Club's most attractive characters.*

*We are grateful to Mrs Iris Coe of Mattishall for transcribing the 'Journal' from the MS and to Mary's great-nephew Dr Martin Sharman for blessing an enterprise of which this is the nineteenth instalment. (Ed.)*

*Mon. June 11. Swaffham.*

Sister Balls and I reached here this afternoon to be greeted by Sister Donne who counts much on having us next door. On our arrival who should appear but Dr John Smith in his way to Holt, having been summoned by the melancholy tidings of his Father's death. His brother Joshua will of course succeed his Father in the Living. Gave him 10/6 for the Chaise, he being short of ready money, added £5 for friendship sake.

*Wed. July 25*

Sister Donne, Sister Balls and Self were taken by Lady Bedingfield to see the Convent at Bodney, where many Nuns escaped from France are settled. The poor women lost everything and are entirely dependent on charity. Gave 7/-.

*Mon. Aug. 6.*

Have been at Norwich with Sister Donne – stayed at Mrs William Donne's. Saw 'Guilty or not Guilty' and a Farce 'Of Age Tomorrow' – the Oratorio 'Deborah' at the Cathedral, and 'Know your own Mind' which we remembered seeing many years since at Bungay just before my Brother Castres and Sister were married. How it brought back those happy days, and my fears that Mr Bodham might never make up his mind to marry me!

*Sat. Aug. 25.*

Have been at Yarmouth at dear Mrs Dade's. Spent several happy days with the Borrett and Worship families – 5 little ones now. Saw 'The Birthday' and a man performing on a Tight Rope. Stopped at Dereham in my way back, dear Kate Hewitt being there. Found her much distressed, her husband being so deep in debt that they are obliged to mortgage their home to avoid a bankruptcy. All must be kept secret, for if it were suspected by his Clients, his business would be ruined. It will be a most deplorable calamity if we are not able to keep him afloat, for his business is now sufficient to lay the foundation of a handsome independence, being near £600 a year. Dr Johnson has begged his friend Mr Hayley to advance £500 on the Security of his Estate. He wrote also of late on his own account to Mr Cowper's friend Mr Joseph Hill, to request his influence to procure him a Prebendal Stall in a Cathedral, and was disappointed

but also diverted by his reply that as the Bishop of Norwich has 14 children, 2 brothers-in-law and a dozen Nephews and Nieces, and the Duke of Rutland (for whom Mr Hill is agent) has numbers of clerical dependents all gaping for his preferment, he cannot oblige. John is recently returned from a visit to a Mr Rye in Northamptonshire. The change has done him good, and he begins to recover his spirits. He did not mention Anne, and we avoided the subject. Peggy Perowne thinks he has been scared off Fanny Brooke, and now has his eye on that young widow of Admiral Dickson of Hardingham Hall, but as she danced all the night at the last Assembly with Major O'Brien, she appears to be setting her cap at him. She will lose Hardingham if she marries, but the old Admiral left her a handsome provision. It is much against poor John that he is so bashful. Last week he drove near 40 miles to see Mr Nicholls, the famous layer-out of Gardens, intending to request him to be so good as to advise him on the laying out of a Garden at Yaxham, where he hopes in time to build a Parsonage House. He carried a Letter of Introduction from a Miss Holroyd, sister of Lord Sheffield, who befriended him at Bath. This he gave to Mr Nicholls in the street at Lowestoft, where he found him walking with a mutual friend who affected an introduction. Mr Nicholls making no comment on the contents of the letter, John was too bashful to mention the subject of his excursion, and, after exchanging bows, withdrew and drove home again. He has heard nothing since, and now intends to employ a Scotsman recommended by Mr Hayley. He is busy exchanging some of his Glebe so as to get all his land together near the Church, and is planting trees to form a shelter to the House when it shall be built. The chestnuts which he brought from Mr Cowper's house at Weston Underwood being grown to 10 or 12 feet high must be transplanted in the Spring or the roots will grow together. The Pupil, Mr Stonestreet, leaves next month for Cambridge. He has been a pleasant addition to the household and a good scholar. A Mr Tuck is to take his place. Gave dear little Kitty a Guinea.

*Mon. Sept. 10. Holt.*

Paid Charles £103.3.6 due to him from Dr Edward Donne for his writings on the occasion of his marriage. This should enable him to settle some of his most pressing debts. They keep a very good table, and I fear Charles drinks more than is prudent. Poor Kate looks frail

and sleeps badly. She misses the dear child now she is away at school, but it was best she should go, for leaving her with the servants, now that Kate goes three times a week for sea baths to Weybourne, was not satisfactory. On one occasion, when her Father was so angry with her for crying that he shut her in the vestibule to the Office and locked the door, she escaped through a window and took the road to Weybourne. Providentially she was met by her Uncle Girdlestone, who brought her back. On another occasion, on their return, they discovered such carryings on – the maids and men dancing – one man in a woman’s lap – and little Kitty sitting high up on a Dresser.

*Sat. Sept. 15.*

Firing has been heard at Dover. Rumour has it that an attempted Invasion has been repulsed by the Fleet.

*Wed. Oct. 17. Swaffham.*

Hear from my Nephew Dr Johnson that Mr Hayley could not himself advance money, but has prevailed upon Mr Joseph Johnson the Publisher to take up a Mortgage on Charles Hewitt’s house at Holt. So for the time being they are saved. My Nephew says that he hopes Charles may now be as care-ful for the time to come as he has been care-empty for the time that’s past!

*Fri. Nov. 30.*

Returned from a fortnight’s visit to dear Mrs Dade at Yarmouth. Spent £25.9.6. Saw many old friends. Stopped at Dereham in my way home, dear Kate Hewitt having informed me she would be there. Mr Miller the Publisher, my Nephew’s Bungay friend, was there on a visit. Tomorrow my Nephew goes to Norwich with Mr Crisp and Charles Hewitt to sign the Mortgage Documents.

*Sat. Dec. 22.*

Buonaparte has been crowned in Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris! What a shameful mockery of religion!

*Mon. Dec. 24.*

The Swaffham Ringers and Singers called for a Christmas Box. Gave them 2/- each. Later the Drummers came. Gave them 1/-. We see many more people here than we did at South Green. Castres being next door at his Mother’s we may expect a lively Christmas.

*Sat. Jan. 5.*

Dear Kate Hewitt and Kitty are come on a visit. My Nephew Dr Johnson is off to Buckinghamshire again in an attempt to secure more of Mr Cowper's letters for Mr Hayley, who intends to bring out a new Edition of his Life. From thence he goes to Bath. Kitty diverts us with stories of school. She is a sensitive child, easily distressed – obliged to be carried home when one of her school-fellows caught her lip opening a pocket-knife with her teeth and walked home with it hanging there. But she enjoys the fun. At the breaking-up all the girls made paper caps, trimmed with every ribband that could be found, and each girl brought some kind of musical instrument to sound at dead of night!

*Sat. Jan. 12. To South Green*

... by the wish of my dear Niece Mrs Edward Donne, who expects to be confined before the end of the month.

*Tues. Jan. 22.*

Sent Mrs Tom Donne a turkey, and my little Godson William Bodham Wright a Guinea.

*Mon. Jan. 28.*

It's a Boy! Both doing well. He is to be named William Bodham [Donne].

*Mon. Feb. 11.*

To Norwich. Bought some silk for a coat. Heard that the Bishop of Norwich is to be made Archbishop of Canterbury.

*Wed. Feb. 27.*

Home once again. On leaving South Green gave dear Anne 7 Guineas, the Nurse 10/6 and something for all the other Servants and the poor of the village. Hear that dear Tilly Church has died – shall miss her sorely. Stopped at Dereham in my way home – found that poor Dr Johnson had been ill at Bath. He has another Pupil, a Mr Ramsden, friend of Mr Mellish of Tuddenham, recommended by Mr Rye. He has a Sister of 21 who might suit John!

## THE PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY

The Society was founded in 1968 by the Rev. Canon L. Rule Wilson and may be said to have two main aims: one, to extend and develop knowledge of James Woodforde's life and the society in which he lived, and the other, to provide opportunity for fellow enthusiasts to meet together from time to time in places associated with the diarist, and to exchange news and views.

Membership of the Parson Woodforde Society is open to any person of the age of 18 years and over upon successful application and upon payment of the subscription then in force, subject only to the power of the committee to limit membership to a prescribed number.

The Annual membership subscription of £16 (overseas members £25, student members £10) becomes due on 1 January and should be forwarded to the Treasurer, David Atterbury Thomas, 47 St John's Road, Blackheath, London SE3 7JW.

### Website:

[www.parsonwoodforde.org.uk](http://www.parsonwoodforde.org.uk)

*Indexes to all past Journals may be accessed from the website under 'Publications'.*

*The indexes cover Subjects, Names, Places and Authors.*

### PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY COMMITTEE 2020/21

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