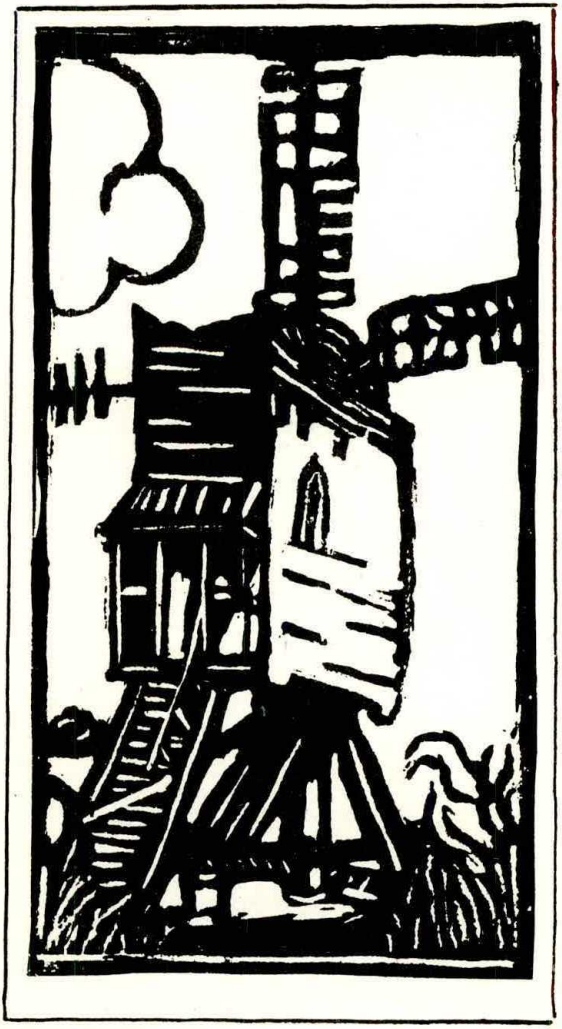
PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY

Quarterly Journal



SNORING MILL, NORFOLK
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VOL. XIX NO. 1 SPRING 1986

Every Sunday, morning and afternoon, the two cracked, flat-toned bells at the church in the village called the faithful to worship. *Ding-dong, Ding-dong, Ding-dong,* they went, and when they heard them, the hamlet churchgoers hurried across fields and over stiles, for the Parish Clerk was always threatening to lock the church door when the bells stopped and those outside might stop outside for all he cared.

With the Fordlow cottages, the Squire's and farmers' families and maids, the Rectory people and the hamlet contingent, the congregation averaged about thirty. Even with this small number, the church was fairly well filled, for it was a tiny place, about the size of a barn, with nave and chancel only, no side aisles. The interior was almost as bare as a barn, with its grey roughcast walls, plain-glass windows, and flagstone floor. The cold, damp, earthy odour common to old and unheated churches pervaded the atmosphere, with occasional whiffs of a more unpleasant nature said to proceed from the stacks of mouldering bones in the vault beneath. Who had been buried there, or when, was unknown, for, excepting one ancient and mutilated brass in the wall by the font, there were but two memorial tablets, both of comparatively recent date. The church, like the village, was old and forgotten, and those buried in the vault, who must have once been people of importance, had not left even a name. Only the stained glass window over the altar, glowing jewel-like amidst the cold greyness, the broken piscina within the altar rails, and a tall broken shaft of what had been a cross in the churchyard, remained to witness mutely to what once had been.

— Flora Thompson: *Lark Rise* (1939) – *World's Classics* ed., 227.

Issued to Members of the Parson Woodforde Society

Chairman
G. H. Bunting
Priddles Hill House
Hadspen
CASTLE CARY
Somerset

Editor
R. L. Winstanley
6 Corville Road
HALESOWEN
West Midlands

Secretary
Mrs. P. Stanley
76 Spencer Street
NORWICH
Norfolk

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EDITORIAL

1986 started off well for the Society, for the year was no more than a few days old when the latest instalment of the complete diary of James Woodforde appeared. It would be improper for me to shower praise upon a publication with which I had personally a great deal to do; but I do feel that this, the third volume of the Ansford Diary series, and the sixth that we have so far presented, really does us credit. The particular thanks of the Society are due to the Rev. Robert Smith, who subjected the transcribed text to a thorough checking which removed a number of errors before printing, and to Miss Penny Taylor, whose masterly index covers not only the volume it accompanies but the earlier volumes, Ansford I and Ansford II, as well.

I feel I am saying no more than the literal truth when I affirm my belief that the double task which the Society has always set itself, from the now faraway days of its inception, is still being carried out. The Journal continues to provide comments and discussion not only on Woodforde's life but also on his background and surroundings. The diary volumes give the reader what Woodforde wrote, exactly as he wrote it.

As for the present Journal, in the essay on the "Yard Boys", I show that Beresford transcribed the name of one of them wrongly. This is bound to draw the critical fire of all those who believe that such minutiae should not be even mentioned; that they "do not matter". Yet Woodforde himself, in whose honour all these labours originated, was very meticulous about accuracy. He quite frequently corrected the spelling of his friends' names, as he got to know how they ought to be written. Thus "M^{r}. Bottom" becomes "M^{r}. Botham" and at last "M^{r}. Bodham".

Apropos of all this, I know a lovely story about Victor Hugo, which honesty compels me most reluctantly to acknowledge that it is totally apocryphal, although the very fact that it was invented about him does tell us something of his personality. According to the anecdote Hugo, when he was living as an exile in Jersey and working on his novel *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*,

discovered a musical instrument much played on by the islanders which, he said grandly to his assembled listeners, was called a *bugpipe.* Here some timid and effaced character, let us say he was the Editor of the 'Victor Hugo Society Quarterly Journal', greatly daring, ventured to interpose. You may imagine him giving a sheep-like cough behind his hand, as he mutters: "Well – er – cher maître, you know – the fact is – um, um – it's not 'bug'; it's 'bag'. 'Bagpipe', my dear sir, 'bagpipe'." At this the great man lost his temper and bellowed furiously: "If I, Victor Hugo, pair de France, etc. etc., say it is *bugpipe,* then it IS *bugpipe*!". End of conversation, and the Editor is carried off, more dead than alive.

It appears to me that the field of Woodforde studies, if we may so describe them, is liberally strewn with literary and historical bugpipes, all sounding off discordantly. I still feel it my duty to silence them, whenever they may be found. For it surely cannot be doubted that there is a principle involved here. Once you shirk the obligation to search out as much as can be known of the truth, and take to producing romantic stories which have no support in fact, chaos sets in, and you end with something like *Providence and Mr. Hardy* which, to the lasting shame of some sections of the academic world, was actually for a time taken seriously.

— R. L. WINSTANLEY

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Our congratulations go to Paul Illingworth, Rector of Weston Longville, on the occasion of his marriage. A trifle belated, since the good news came just too late for inclusion in our last issue, they are never-the-less exceedingly sincere and all members will wish to be associated with our message of good wishes to Paul and his wife and for much happiness in their future life together.

Members' response to the recent Questionnaire was not as good as had been hoped when the idea was first considered. All replies, however, are being analysed and a report prepared for presentation to the A.G.M. The details will also be published in a future issue of the Journal, together with whatever decisions your committee may have reached as a result of the exercise. We shall, at least, be in a position to know rather more accurately than at present the wishes of those members who responded. A number who have never been able to attend a "Frolic" felt themselves disqualified from completing the form. This is a pity, since suggestions in keeping with their own wishes would have been welcomed. If you were numbered amongst these, but still have a contribution to make, please don't hesitate to write even at this late stage. All comments will be discussed by your committee.

Are you one of the 60 or so members who have not yet forwarded their subscription for 1986? Prompt payment means a good deal less work by way of "reminder" letters, in addition to savings on postage. I shall be grateful if those who have not yet paid up will kindly do so in the near future. May I again remind members who remit by banker's order that the Society's account is maintained at the Castle Cary branch of National Westminster and that the account number is 68682077.

Those members proposing to attend the "Frolic" in Somerset this year will have received full programme details of the weekend. Whilst arranging a visit to the Cathedral at Wells I was fortunate enough to find in the archives there an original letter from James Woodforde, addressed to the Chapter Clerk and written in September, 1772. It is hoped that it will be possible to reproduce this in a future issue of the Journal. It is currently anticipated that some 60 members will be present this time and we look forward to another successful event.

– G. H. BUNTING
Chairman

"SKIP-JACKS"

As we know, the servants at Weston Parsonage in the days of Parson Woodforde included some very long stayers. Pride of place in that respect must go to the "Farming Man", Ben Leggett. He was taken on during Woodforde's first year of residence at Weston, and was still in his employ over 26 years later, when the Parson died and the household broke up. Will Coleman, the only Somerset man among the servants of the years in Norfolk, arrived with Woodforde and stayed until 1785, when he was discharged, and replaced by Bretingham Scurl who remained for the rest of the diarist's lifetime.

On the other hand the young women servants came and went in a much faster tempo of changeover. There were so many of these, in fact, that their number and vicissitudes formed the subject of a long essay, *Maidservants at the Parsonage,* published in 1971, at a time when the Journal was first embarking on those studies of Woodforde's familiar and characteristic environment that have since been carried forward into so many aspects of his life. The boys also tended to come and go in fairly rapid succession, but in their case there was no intention to employ them for more than a few years, until they grew, as Woodforde put it, "too big for the Place". These boys have, by comparison with the adult servants, been somewhat neglected, appearing only in incidental references and from time to time in articles devoted to other topics. So let us repair this omission now, as best we can.

If we look at the daily running of Weston Parsonage it is possible to derive some kind of picture from what the diary tells us, even if this is not on all points a very clear one. Ben looked after the Parsonage glebe and the other pieces of his master's farming land, and probably was on hand to do most of the jobs requiring physical strength, such as drawing water from the well that was located in the yard, just outside the back kitchen. One of the girls did the cooking and the other was what was later known as a "housemaid", a word never used by the diarist. She would have swept and dusted the rooms, cleaned the floors, made the beds, lighted the fires and so on. She also did the

milking, a very important job in that household. In Woodforde's latter years the order of having the cook employed as the senior or "head" maid was not adhered to. Sally Gunton for example was cook, but junior to and paid less than Betty Dade, a housekeeper in all but name.

It seems likely that the boys did not have any definitely and exactly laid down scheme of duties, but took part in the general routine of the house, aiding whichever of the other servants might need assistance for a particular task, and helping out on special occasions, such as "Washing Week" or the annual Tithe Audit, on which latter occasions they could usually earn an extra shilling for themselves. They also worked outdoors in harvest time and, no doubt with pleasure, accompanied their master on some of his coursing and fishing expeditions. We hear most about the duties of the "Yard Boys" in connection with Jack Warton, the first of them and by far the best-liked. Later on Woodforde has less to say about what the boys happened to be doing, and when he does mention them it is often in a tone of disapproval. Whether this was because he grew more crotchety and irritable with advancing years, or because hardly any of the successive boys could measure up to Jack's standards of honesty, willingness and capacity for hard work, it is impossible to determine.

In the registers Jack's family appears as "Wharton" throughout, and the use by Woodforde of the other form may have been due to a subconscious reminiscence of the famous Joseph Warton, *Hostiarius* or Under Master at Winchester during part of the diarist's schooldays there. It would seem hardly open to doubt that Jack's father was the "George Son of Thomas & Judith Wharton" baptised at Weston on 12/8/1731; although if this is so his age on the burial entry made out by Woodforde in 1794 is two years out, and he died at the age of 63 not 65. In 1741 – only the year can be read – the burial of a "Thomas Wharton" is recorded, while five years later, in 1746, Judith Wharton, noted as "Wid." was married to Thomas "Donal" (Qu. Dunnell?), a widower.

The diary has one or two odd references to George Wharton.

On 11/3/1777 Woodforde bought from him six hundred "Thorn Plants" at eightpence the hundred. The only possible use he could have had for these was in the making or repair of hedges, and the sale does not at all imply that George was a cultivator of land. It is much more probable that he dug up the plants from the wasteland which we know to have existed in some quantity in the parish at this time. It is likely that he was not only a labourer but one of the poorest of that class, the poverty of the family being the initial reason why the Parson took in his son.

The records show that George Wharton was twice married. In that part of the old register devoted to marriages the following may be read under the year 1755:

> George Wharton & Mary Drake both single
> Persons of Weston after Banns duly publish'd
> on Three several Sundays were married in the
> Church of Weston on June the seventeenth
> by me W^{m} Conold Curate

James Smith, now famous as the parish clerk of Woodforde's day, signed as a witness. It may be added that all this should have been set down on one of the printed forms authorized by Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act already in force; but Weston did not get round to using these until a year later. The details, however, are those which would have been required to fill up a marriage certificate, and are consequently much more complete than those found in earlier marriage entries.

The page with the corresponding burial entries for this and the next few years in the register is very difficult to read and in some places so badly stained as to be illegible. The details immediately following are taken from the original register, not the microfilm. There is no reference to the burial of Mary Wharton, George's wife, but she must have died before 29 November 1759, on which day he, described as "Widower", remarried. His new bride was Sarah Bennet. A "W^{m} Bidewell", not the well-known Woodfordean Billy but his father, signed as one witness, and James Smith again appended his signature.

Three children of this second marriage may be found in the baptismal entries, two named after George's parents. Judith was baptised on 1/11/1761, and Thomas on 9/12/1763. We know just a little about the latter from the diary. He was a cripple, a "lame Boy", to whom Woodforde sometimes gave sixpence or allowed to have a meal in the Parsonage kitchen. Sarah Wharton was baptised on 15 February 1772. No entry for Jack himself is to be found, presumably for no better reason than that Mr. Howes forgot to enter his name on the register from the rough notes to the equally rough list that he evidently considered good enough for the records of a parish not his own. If, however, Jack was as Woodforde says between 10 and 11 years old when he entered the Parson's service in the summer of 1776, he was probably born early in 1766.

The conditions of his service are fully set out in a diary passage written on 3 August:

> George Warton's little Boy John came to live with me last Thursday, and I am to give him his Victuals and some Cloaths when he wants the same – He does not sleep at my House as he has not had the small-Pox –

In his first few months Jack presumably went back each night to sleep at his parents' house; but this was an unsatisfactory arrangement and so on 1 November, with the disease prevalent in the village, Dr. Thorne called about inoculating Ben and Jack together. This was in fact done two days later, the diarist giving a fully detailed account of the process which may be found in the Society's edition of *Norfolk Diary I, 83-4.*

Jack, working for his keep, was not entitled to wages. Woodforde always stuck to it that, as he pointed out some years later when appealing against having to pay the Male Servants' Tax for Jack, he was employing the boy "out of Charity". Jack, however, quickly became a favourite, and little more than a fortnight after his arrival Woodforde was handing him a sixpenny tip, soon followed by another to his brother, the lame boy. In January 1781, the first occasion on which he paid all the servants together at the beginning of the year, a practice he continued for the rest of his life, he added the following:

Gave my Servant Boy, Jack Warton, as he has no
Wages, and which I intend giving him annually – 0 : 10 : 6
– *Norfolk Diary III, 5/1/1781*

For the next two years the same payment was made, Woodforde throwing in an extra 2/6d. "as a free gift" in 1783. That year also, on the day when he paid Jack and the other servants for their year's work, he wrote down an entry in the book which he was using to record his accounts with the household staff:

Mem: Jan^{ry} 13 – 1783 – Promised then to
Jack Warton, to give him the ensueing Year
1. Guinea for Wages –

Jack stayed at the Parsonage for two more years after that. By the autumn of 1784 he had been there for just over 8 years and must have been between 18 and 19 years old. Only the mutual liking and respect between him and his master could have kept him there so long, and in such a capacity, since from the age of 18 he would have been entitled to seek a place which gave him a full man's wage. Woodforde wrote on 7 October 1784:

. . . Jack told me this morning that he is advised
to get another Place being too old for a Skip-Jack
any longer – He wants to be a Plow Boy to some Farmer
to learn the farming Business as he likes that best.
I told him that he was very right to try to better
himself, and at Lady Day next he is to leave my
House for that Purpose – He has been a very good Lad
Ever since he has been here –

But what, exactly and precisely, was a ploughboy? If a farmer were ploughing with oxen, for example, or on some very heavy and intractable soils, the services of several adult men might be needed; but in agriculturally advanced Norfolk, with the advent of lighter, more efficient ploughs and improved drainage, it was enough to have a single ploughman at work, assisted by a boy who walked at the head of the team and turned it at the headlands. The point about Jack was that if he had gone to work on a farm some years before he would by now have no doubt learned the duties well enough to be employable as a ploughman; whereas, after spending so many years in Woodforde's household, he would still be a learner on any farm he went to. Hence his determination to waste no more time.

Early in the new year, on 6 January 1786, Jack received his wages along with the other servants. Then on 25 January Woodforde wrote:

> One Sucker from Mattishall a little Farmer came here
> this morning with his Son John about 13. Years of Age
> to desire me to take his said Son at old Lady Day next
> in the room of Jack Wartton who then leaves me
> on Account of his now being too Old for his Place –
> and which after some talk with his Father I agreed
> to take him then being well recommended before
> by M[r]. and M[rs]. Bodham and M[r]. Smith –
> I gave the Boy, by way of earnest Mony 0 : 1 : 0
> I am to give him for Wages 1 : 1 : 0
> A Coat and Waistcoat and Hat when wanted
> to allow him something for being washed out & mended.
> And his Friends to find him in Stockings and Shoes &c.

Jack finally left on 7 April, obligingly staying another two days, since what had happened when he himself had been taken on was repeated. As soon as the Parson learned that the new boy had never had smallpox, he sent him home – "and therefore will get him inoculated by D[r]. Thorne if I can". Woodforde's last mention of Jack amounts to a very handsome compliment:

> Jack has
> been a very good, sober Lad in my Service, and
> should have been glad to have continued him
> but he is very desirous of learning to plow &c. –
> I paid him for his last Quarters Service – 0 : 5 : 3
> I paid and gave him besides – 0 : 5 : 3

Just a week later, on 14 April, Woodforde finally nerved himself to get rid of Will Coleman, getting up especially early to confront the man and pay him off. It must have been abundantly clear for quite some time that Coleman would have to go, sooner or later. I am not, all the same, sure whether the diarist's remark about Jack, quoted above, that he would have been glad to keep him on, implies that he ever considered offering him Will's place, if the young man had wanted it.

The passages about Jack Warton for 7/10/1784 and 7/4/1785 are very well-known, not only because they are both in

Beresford's edition of the diary but also because the editor alluded to them in the introduction to his second volume:

> . . . He will rejoice that Jack Warton wanted to be a ploughboy, and not to worsen himself in the city.

It is an example of Beresford's besetting weakness as an editor, the urge to volunteer wholly gratuitous information, and without checking its accuracy. There is in the diary no word about the possibility of Jack's going to work in any city, and it is plain that his alternative to the agricultural life he wanted to take up would have been to go on being a domestic servant.

Jack Secker – the diarist had now corrected the spelling of his name – took up his post on 27 April. Within the space of a year or so we see him in a number of ordinary situations: walking to Mattishall with Betty Dade to see their "Friends" there (26 June); driving Mrs. Davie and Betsy to their new lodgings, along with "some cold boiled beef, stuffed with Parsley, some Turnips, Radishes, Colliflowers and 4. Cucumbers", practical gifts of the Parson (15 September); going to Norwich to bring back "my little Mare Jenny", on whom Nephew Sam had ridden to take the London coach, at the end of his stay at Weston (5 December); and enjoying himself at Mattishall Gaunt, again with Betty (23 May 1786). After a stay of two years, he reached the upper age limit to which with a single exception Woodforde henceforth rigidly adhered. We have the impression that Jack Secker did his work adequately but never managed to inspire the affection that had been given to Jack Warton.

The name "Crossley", found in the printed edition in three places, and of course in the index, is Beresford's error of transcription for Cropley. This name occurs quite often in the parish records. Charles Cropley married Lydia Allen at Weston on 22/10/1764, and they had four other children – Mary (1765), Thomas (1769), Lydia (1771) and Elizabeth (1779), besides Charles who was baptized on 24/3/1774. His mother brought him up to the Parsonage on 5 February 1787, obviously as soon as she heard that Secker was leaving. At Lady Day, exactly two months later, Charles took over from

him. He is, however, mentioned only once or twice during the time he spent in Woodforde's employ, and then only on the most routine and mundane occasions; as when he and the other servants received a tip for their extra work on the night of the Tithe Audit.

In January 1788 he was paid for the three-quarters of a year outstanding wages. But he did not stay for the whole of the ensuing year, for he left on Old Michaelmas Day, 10 October, which in itself implies that he had another place to go to. Indeed he had, for Woodforde noted in his accounts book: "gone to live with M^{r}. Burton". He was given to keep the clothes his master had bought for him, as they had also been bought for Secker; a coat and waistcoat. In neither of the cases is there any mention of a hat, which had been one of Jack Warton's perquisites.

Two days after Charles Cropley had gone away, another boy moved in. He was John Dalliday, or Dalady as he himself wrote his name, a form never used by Woodforde. For him the diarist not only upped the usual wage but actually doubled it, agreeing to pay the boy two guineas a year, but "no Cloaths whatever". It would be very interesting to know if this change in the conditions of service reflected an increase in the price of clothing, as employers always had to balance the actual value of cash wages against payments in kind. However this may have been, he was creating a precedent here, to which he was obliged to adhere. All the successive yard boys had an annual wage of two guineas.

The new boy was presumably the son of "one Dalliday of France Green", from whom Woodforde had bought "6. Chicken and 5. Ducks" on 24 June. Later, in May 1792, he gave the man five shillings on his "losing a Horse", that very common reason for a plea for charity in Woodforde's time. The boy, however, was no very shining example of his kind. On 8 December 1788, not long after his arrival, when the Tithe Frolic came round, the wretched lad disgraced himself. "I used to give my Boy a Shilling, but he made himself so beastly drunk that Day, that I gave him nothing". On 19 September 1789, returning from his holiday in the West country, the diarist

brought back gifts for all the servants except the boy, who was presented with "in Cash 0 : 2 : 6".

Dalady left after exactly two years' service and was succeeded by Billy Downing. We know more about his family and its circumstances than we do about the antecedents of the three previous boys. His father was Robert Downing, a near neighbour of the Parson and a poor man with a large family to support, who nearly died after the inoculation of his children against smallpox, paid for by Woodforde, had brought the disease into the house. In spite of this, and of the ministrations of the "frightful old Woman" Goody Tuddenham who nursed him, he survived the illness and lived to be 95.

One of the young Downings had been in service at Weston House, back in 1788. Woodforde reported on 17 March of that year that the mansion was "all in a Hurry, on Account of the Itch being among some of the Servants supposed brought by the Boy Downing". Beresford's indexer identifies this boy as Billy, not knowing of any other boys with the same surname. Born in 1776, he would have been about 12 at the time, and it is impossible to say whether the reference is to him or, on the contrary, to an elder brother, owing to the confusions of the register over this family. *(See Appendix)*

The note on Billy in the servants' accounts reads: "No Cloaths – to be washed out of house". Woodforde may have felt that the task of washing the boy's clothes would be in good hands, since his mother was one of the supernumerary washerwomen who came in to help in "Washing Week", as well as taking in washing for other people.

It was Billy who, in a very well-known passage in the diary, held an umbrella over his master's head while he conducted a funeral in the rain at Great Witchingham. Another story about him illustrates a facet of eighteenth century social life often overlooked by historians. The old horse "Punch" reached a state in which he could not get up and was shot by Ben "to put him out of his Misery, no shadow of his being better". Having flayed the carcase, Ben "carried poor Punch's Skin to Norwich to sell and sold it for 9 s/0 d, which I gave to him and Boy – Ben gave the

Boy out of the Skin 3 s/0 d". It was the chance of such incidental perquisites that made the places of servants so much more valuable a source of income than they would seem to be, if one looked only at the amount of their wages.

As for Billy Downing, he left at the beginning of 1793, "having got a place in the House of M r. Press Custance at Lyng". He had been paid his wages for the year just a fortnight before, so he now had only 2/6d. to collect, covering those two weeks, and a further half-crown which the diarist gave him as a tip. In 1802 he is mentioned as Mr. Custance's coachman.

The next boy was Timothy Tooley, the son of a Weston resident named John Tooley, "about 12. Years old". Until near the end of his time of employment at the Parsonage, hardly anything is recounted of him beyond the listing of wages and tips, with an occasional present. When Parson Woodforde returned from Somerset for the last time of his life, in 1795, he gave Tim one of the "2. Silk Handkerchiefs from Spittal Fields, Chocolate Ground & Yellow Spots", which he had just bought from Mr. Aldridge the travelling draper, for the unusually high price of eleven shillings the pair.

Owing to his youth at the time of his arrival, Tim Tooley might have looked forward to a three years' stay at the Parsonage. He should have gone at the beginning of 1796 but Woodforde appears to have been willing to relax his own rule. Tim did in fact leave in 1796, but he discharged himself, and in rather a dramatic way.

On 6 May Woodforde gave the boy five shillings, "being going to Norwich to Morrow to get some Cloaths . . .". He had, as we saw, abandoned the practice of giving clothes at the time Dalady's annual wage was doubled; but wartime inflation was forcing prices up, and two guineas a year was not what it had been in the 1780's. On the following day the Parson added:

> . . . My Boy, Tim, walked to Norwich this Morning
> and returned in very good time in the Evening –
> I gave him 2. pair of very good worsted Stock=
> =ings to day, which I promised Yesterday – that he
> might not buy too much of that Article –

He had always been generous in such small ways with his servants, when they had pleased him. It was probably a considerable surprise to him when only three days later young Tim ran off to enlist in the army although, as he now learned, "his Head has long run on a Soldiers Life". It must have been the trip to Norwich to buy clothes, which he was not to wear, that finally decided him, for while he was there he had been offered ten guineas "if he would go for a Soldier". This great augmentation of the old "King's Shilling" reveals the effect of the war, and shows how anxious the Government was to increase numbers in the armed forces.

Tim slept overnight in the Parson's barn, which no-one presumably thought to search, although his absence from the house had been discovered when the servants went to bed. And "very early this Morning he marched of for Norwich to enter into his Majesty's land service" – which sounds a very dashing way to put it, and conjures up visions of tremendous battle-fields, and Private Tooley capturing hundreds of Frenchmen single-handed. Another boy, "Richmonds eldest Son", enlisted with him. A few days later, on 16 May, Woodforde wrote:

> . . . My late Servant Lad, Tim Tooley, called on us this Morning – He came from Norwich with a Cockade in his Hat, and says he has entered himself in the thirty third Regiment of Foot – Poor Fellow, he appeared happy & looked well – I paid him what Wages were due to him and half a Crown extraordinary, in all 17 : 6 –

He had already engaged Tim's brother Tom Tooley to step into the vacant place. But this was not a successful appointment, and Tom lasted only until 10 June:

> . . . I was obliged this morning to turn away my new Lad (Tom Tooley) as he would do nothing at all –

Perhaps he too hankered after the adventurous life of a soldier in wartime, and found the work of the Parsonage abandoned by his brother intolerably dull. His successor was even more unsatisfactory. He came from Frans Green and was, rather unusually, taken "on trial" on 11 June 1796. He was employed

only until Old Michaelmas Day, when Woodforde very unceremoniously dismissed him, commenting severely:

> . . . My Boy, John Brand, left my Service to Day, as he had proper Notice so to do, being the most saucy swearing Lad that ever we had, and am afraid that if he does not soon do better, he will bring his poor Mother with sorrow to her Grave –
> He can do his Work well if he pleases, but cannot be trusted out of Sight, but the worst is, he is profligate –
> Ben paid him his Wages due to him for four Months Service, due this Michaelmas day at the Rate of two Guineas per Annum – He went before Dinner, and in the Evening my new Boy of this Parish by name Barnabas Woodcock between 11. and 12. Years of Age – succeeded him –
> Dinner to day, Hash Mutton & a Pudding and a Goose rosted, being Old Michaelmas Day –

This was the traditional day on which to eat a "Michaelmas goose" or "stubble goose", a bird that had been fattened on the stubble since harvest. Barnabas, the newcomer, perhaps did something to restore his employer's tottering faith in boy-nature. Nothing to his discredit is reported of him, and on 12 June 1798 Woodforde gave him a shilling after he had helped his relation, William Woodcock, to hive the swarm of bees that summer. In former days his virtues might have been highlighted as those of Jack Warton had been. But at this late stage of his life Woodforde was growing so self-centred that his attention was more and more concentrated upon the physical symptoms of his malaise. Open the diary anywhere in the last volume of Beresford's edition, and you are as likely as not to be confronted by such passages as these:

> . . . When I waked this Morning I found that a gouty Pain had seized the little Toe of my left Foot but not bad. It made me walk very hobling, but it might be better for me. Perhaps it might proceed from eating pretty freely last Night for Supper – on some very fine rosted Oysters &c. –

> . . . Something better this morning, very little Pain in my Foot, perhaps it would be better for me if my Constitution was strong enough to admit a severer fit of the Gout, but my Appetite at

present is so exceeding weak, that I can scarce relish any food whatever, particularly Poultry, Beef &c. Dinner to day boiled Beef and a rosted Fowl –

– Diary: 12 & 13 January 1798
(Beresford's text)

Off his food for one day, he had already forgotten the oysters of two days before. A person in this situation of perpetual self-awareness as to the slightest imagined changes in his health could not be expected to take much notice of a boy who came and went about the house; except, of course, when he attracted attention by some fault or misdemeanour.

In his turn Barnabas Woodcock outgrew his place. He left at Michaelmas 1799, unconscious like the others that his stay at the Parsonage would ensure that his name would be remembered two centuries after his time. On 3 September of that year Woodforde had in anticipation of his going hired a boy named Henry Daines, favourably impressed by what he took to be his "open honest Countenance"; also, "his Mother who came with him, seemed to be a good kind of Woman & very motherly". But appearances were delusive here, for Henry turned out to be a disaster, and one year later he formally received the order of the boot. In the diary Woodforde magisterially relegated him to the Rogues' Gallery, using about him very much the same kind of epithets as he had formerly expended on Brand.

We breakfasted, dined, &c. again at home –
This being Old Michaelmas Day, I paid
my Servant Boy, Henry Daines, three
Quarters of a Years Wages due this Day
at two Guineas per Annum – 1 : 11 : 6
and dismissed him from my Service
not behaving in the manner that I expected
from him, as he could not be trusted to
do any thing if not overlooked, and also
a very saucy, foul-mouthed Lad –

Of course, ever since the first prehistoric caveman took a boy to sweep the bones of the latest mastodon feast out of the cave and generally keep it clean and tidy, employers have made this kind of complaint, as have parents, guardians, schoolmasters and

many others. As for the foul-mouthed qualities of Brand and Daines, we should have been extremely grateful to our diarist if, foreseeing the great interest taken by academics of our day in the particularities of "demotic" speech, he had taken the trouble to note down exactly what they said as they went about, swearing quietly to themselves over their work, or lifting their voices in choice samples of verbal repartee, since eighteenth century speech habits among the working classes are little known to us.

The next boy was Robert Case. We do have a great deal of information about his family, thanks to the researches of Dr. David Case, almost certainly a lineal descendant of this same Robert. The Cases are an interesting example, I think, of a farming family in decline during Woodforde's incumbency at Weston. In 1768 Robert's grandfather, "old William Case", as Woodforde called him, was on the polling list for the county election of that year, a proof that he owned at least some small quantity of freehold land. He died in 1788, and from 1793 "Old Mrs. Case" made up one of the recipients of charity who ate their Christmas dinner in the Parsonage kitchen; in fact she was the first woman to do so. In 1797 the diarist called her "Eliz. Case a poor old Widow". On Easter Day 1801 she had dinner in the Parsonage and was given 2/6d. besides. She died in December of that year.

Henry Case, Robert's father, clearly left Weston and did not return until after William had died. Dr. Case's investigations show that he was married to Martha West at Heydon in 1777 and his first child, William, was baptised at Cawston in 1779. Robert himself was baptised at Corpusty in 1788. This may suggest that Henry Case was an itinerant worker, moving with his small family from farm to farm; especially as we see that, after his return to Weston, we find him doing casual work for Woodforde, threshing in the Parsonage barn. This was on 4 March 1794 and Robert, then between five and six years old, was with his father. Woodforde gave him sixpence.

Coming in as he did one day after the dismissal of Henry Daines, Robert was no doubt looked upon as a welcome change

from that foul-mouthed lad. This particular charge was not to be laid against his account, but he seems to have done practically everything else wrong. On 10 March 1801 the inevitable Aldridge reappeared. Woodforde bought some material for his servants, including "a Waistcoat-Piece for my Boy Robert Case". One week later the diarist records mournfully:

> . . . My Yard Boy, Robt. Case hath behaved of
> late I hear but indifferently – He has
> been guilty of many bad Actions of late –
> A bad return for the Waistcoat I lately gave him
> It vexed me a good deal to hear it –

By this time he was no doubt convinced, as elderly persons are prone to believe, that boys were never like that in the days when he was young. But Case went on getting into trouble:

> . . . Our Boy (Robt. Case) found
> out to be rather dishonest this
> Morning in taking some Mony
> from his Fellow Servant Briton,
> but soon returned it again –
>
> – *Diary, 20/7/1801*

On the following day the diarist, evidently growing somewhat forgetful as he now occasionally did, repeated the story and added a little more to it:

> . . . Our Boy Bob Case was Yesterday detected
> in taking Money out of Britons Box, which
> after some time he confessed the same and
> returned all the Money to him again very soon
> I was very sorry to hear of it as it prognosti=
> =cates no very good look-on in the World –

We see here the tolerance and leniency in private relations that was so often at complete variance with the harshness of the penal code; for if he had been prosecuted, Robert's youth – he was about 13 at the time – would not have saved him from a criminal charge which might have ended in his being transported. The second of the two cited passages is interesting because it confirms the supposition, first made in the old essay on the house which has lately been reprinted as *A Tour of Weston Parsonage 1984 (Journal XVII, 3),* that it was Briton

and the succession of skip-jacks who shared the bedroom marked on the 1803 inventory as "No. 15. Manservant's Room". The boy would be in the best position to know what was in the box which Briton, in common with all other living-in servants, kept for personal belongings.

On 2 September 1802 Robert was helping with the harvest, work in which all the boys used to take part. He was riding on top of a load of barley which was being taken to the barn. It was very hot weather, the crop was so dry that the load slipped and he fell off the cart. But – "the Boy not hurt at all", as Woodforde wrote with relief.

When Old Michaelmas Day came round again, the boy's two year period of service expired. The account of his leaving must have been written down on one of the pages which someone ripped out of this part of the diary. Thanks to Dr. Case's researches – his article on the subject is indeed a model of its kind – Robert is the only one of the Parsonage yard boys whose track we can follow after he left the Parsonage. His parents, Henry and Martha, stayed at Weston, where the father died in 1821 and the mother in 1846. After the last date there was no-one of the name living in the village. The three sons branched out for themselves, and all of them went to live in places eastwards of Norwich. William married Sarah Richmond in 1802 at Freethorpe, where he was a gardener. She belonged to the Weston family of that name and was a sister of the boy who enlisted with Tim Tooley. She was buried at Weston in 1812. Henry, the youngest brother, was at Scottow in 1819, when his daughter was baptised in that parish. A note in the register states that he was "at present superintending his father's farm at Weston". He later became a farmer at Tunstead. There would seem no reasonable doubt that the Robert Case who settled in Acle, between Norwich and Yarmouth, married there in 1814 and died in 1838, aged 49, the doctor's direct ancestor, was the same person as Woodforde's former yard-boy.

He was very nearly, but not quite, the last of the boys. The fact that his successor's arrival was entered on the blotting paper

among the weather note opposite the entry for 11 October preserved it when the corresponding page was torn out. It was the day after Old Michaelmas, and we can see that the old routine was kept up to the very end:

> Our New Boy J$^{n}_{o}$ Lane about 13. Years old, came to his Place to Night and slept here
> I continue very indifferent indeed – Pain so great scarce able to walk –

Just six days after writing this, Woodforde must have suffered the attack or seizure which, of whatever kind it was, became the immediate precursor of his death ten weeks later. One wonders what the new boy made of it – servants running up and down, bells ringing in the upper rooms, appeals for this or that medicament, the doctor calling; and then perhaps an uncanny silence settling over the house.

As young Lane had scarcely had time to begin his duties perhaps Bill and Nancy, who were looking after things in the Parsonage, sent him home. When, soon after the Parson's death, they settled accounts with the servants, paying each of them a year's wages, there is no record of their having given anything to the boy who, if he were still in the house, would have been entitled to a quarter's wages. Woodforde himself, so meticulous that he took care to pay Sally Dunnell for the six days she had stayed before he discovered that she did not know how to cook and so dismissed her, would never have shirked such an obligation.

*

One last question remains – coming, as they did, mostly from the small farmer or tradesman class, what kind of educational standard were they likely to have reached, before they became yard boys; for Woodforde certainly never volunteered to have them taught anything? The picture is no clearer within the walls of Weston Parsonage, that tiny microcosm of eighteenth century life, than it is in the Georgian world as a whole.

Indeed, the entire question of *literacy* in the rural areas during this period is hedged around with insoluble problems. Those

historical specialists who call themselves "demographers", after the study of human populations, sometimes appear to me to be making quite unjustified assumptions, statements based on evidence which is by no means strong enough to support them. Statistical tables showing "literacy rates" may seem impressive enough, providing we do not look too closely at the sources which have provided the material for the tables; but if we do that, it then becomes patently obvious that the whole question is much more complex than the confident assurances of the researchers would have us believe. It is necessary only to glance at some of the signatures in parish documents, made perhaps two or three times in a person's whole lifetime, by hands to which the holding of a pen was far less familiar than the grasp of plough handles or a milking pail, to see that in such a context the notion of "literacy" means precisely nothing. Similarly, we are equally without justification for supposing that, if a person makes a mark on one document on a single occasion, it is proof that he or she was unable to write.

Take the illuminating case of Sally Gunton. She joined the Parsonage household late in 1794 and drew her first wages at the beginning of the next year. Woodforde wrote down her name, and she added a rough cross to stand for a signed receipt. The same thing happened each year down to and including 1799. But in 1800 something very interesting happened. This supposedly illiterate girl produced a very legible, clear *Sarah Gunton*. The probable explanation is that Betty or Briton had taught her to write. The same well-formed signature reappears on the receipts for 1801, 1802, and on the last one when the servants were paid off on 5 January 1803. Yet in May she was married in Weston church to her "intended", Thomas Harrison the thatcher and, although her two bridesmaids or attendants, "Elizabeth Dade" and "Elizabeth Smith", sign the certificate, all Sally contributes is simply a mark. Was it due to nervousness, on this special day when she was the centre of attention? Or had perhaps Mr. Wilson, who conducted the ceremony, already written her name on the certificate, so that there was no room for more than a mark?

It should not, therefore, occasion surprise that no conclusions

may be drawn about the "literacy" of the yard boys in Woodforde's household. All we have to go on, and it is little indeed, is the handful of wage-receipts. One of the boys, Brand, had for some reason I cannot fathom no receipt made out for him. Three, Downing, Dalady and Daines, signed for their money. They all wrote copperplate script, with fancy curlicues to the capital letters, and their signatures are so alike as to encourage the belief that they had all been taught by the same writing master. One of the female servants, the epileptic girl who was at the Parsonage in 1791, signed as "Anne Goulden", in very much the same kind of hand. These contrast very forcibly with the much more personal and individual signatures of Betty and Briton, who were probably literate in the true sense of the term; persons familiar with the written word.

All the boys except those just mentioned appended a mark when they came to receive their wages.

*

APPENDIX: THE DOWNING FAMILY, A GENEALOGICAL MYSTERY

A lady wrote to me some time ago stating that she was the lineal descendant of Robert Downing and his wife Anne Moor. She enclosed a note of their children which at the moment has gone astray; but I have a general impression that it was far simpler than what appears, bafflingly, from the Weston register.

Here are the entries from that source, copied exactly as they are set out there:

1758 Mary the Daughter of Robt. & Anne Downing) Nov. 6

1758 Mary the Daughter of Robert & Anne Downing) Nov. 8

Mary the Daughter of Robert & Anne Downing baptd. Ap: 11 1761

Elizabeth ye. Daughter of Robert & Anne Downing baptd. Mar: 18. 1764

Esther the Daughter of Robert & Anne Downing baptd. Ap. ye 27. 1766

Robert Son of Robert & Anne
Downing – baptized Jan. 24. 1768

William Son of Robert & Anne
Downing – bapt^{d}. Jan. 30. 1768

Susan y^{e} Daughter of Robert & Anne
Downing was baptizd, Nov: 17. 1769

Francis Son of Robert & Anne
Downing – bapt^{d}. Feb: 14 : 1773

William Son of Robert & Anne Downing
was baptizd Jan. 7. 1776

The only certainty we could have here is that there is something wrong. Our first suspicion must surely be that these births were shared between two couples named Robert and Anne Downing. However, neither the registers nor Woodforde's diary gives any support to a theory that there were two sets of identically named Downings, and it would be hard to believe in a coincidence that provides each couple with a daughter Mary, and both baptized in the space of two days. It is, given the state of these registers before Woodforde came along to keep them properly posted, more likely that the entries which cannot be reconciled with one another simply represent mistakes made by Mr. Howes. For example, after noting down the first Downing child under the baptismal date of 6/11/1758, he may have discovered that this was incorrect, wrote another entry to put it right but forgot to cross out the wrong date. Then there is the awkward question of sons Robert and the first William, baptized only a week apart in 1768. Were they twins, or have we here a case of an older child baptized together with a younger? And if either of these suppositions is correct, why did the ceremonies not take place on the same day? Some of the children must have died, seeing that younger siblings were given their names, but the burials register has no entries that would confirm this. In fact, it is perfectly impossible to tell how many children the Downings really had.

At the end of his first year at Weston, full of good intentions, Woodforde set down in his accounts volume a list of the poor

people to whom he gave sixpence at Christmas. Very helpfully he added the number of their children. So we can read there – "Rob^{t}. Downing – a Wife and – 5. Children", which sounds circumstantial enough. Yet on 21 November, when arranging for the inoculation of the children, he had written in the diary:

> He is a poor labouring Man & has a Wife and seven small Children –

It is inconceivable that two of the children could have died between the last-cited date and the end of the year without any mention, particularly since Woodforde was now keeping the registers and their accuracy may be vouched for. It is more likely that he had never actually counted the children and did not know how many of them there were.

Nearly all the allusions to the Downing children in the diary are purely incidental. The "Lad of Downings" who was shearing wheat in 1787 was probably Billy's elder brother Robert. In 1791 "one of Downings Girls" is mentioned as the mother of an illegitimate child named Edward.

WOODFORDE'S WESTON

The article which recently appeared in the Journal (XVIII, 4) entitled *Weston Families – Gooch and Bushell* prompts me to write on the subject of roads at Weston. The article opened with the following introduction:

> To-day, the building which stands on the approximate site of James Woodforde's Parsonage is isolated. Between it and Weston Church is an expanse of fields with no sign that there have been any human habitations there. In the Parson's time the appearance of this part of Weston must have been very different . . .

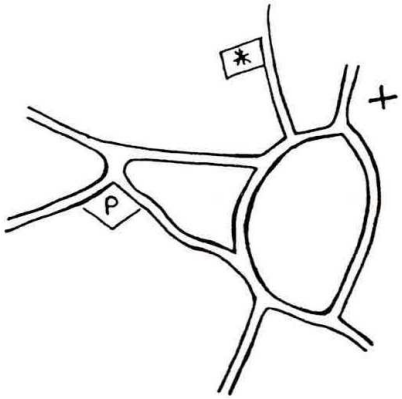
Readers of the Journal and those who revisit Weston from time to time should be aware that the road layout between the Parsonage and the Church has undoubtedly changed since Woodforde's time. My Case ancestors were farmers in a small

way in Weston and some time ago I was delighted to find "Case's Pightle" marked on a map which is to be found in the Norfolk Record Office. (1). This little field is located at the top of Post Office Lane. Since making this discovery I have taken every opportunity to collect information from various maps of Weston which I have come across. From these sources it is clear that in Woodforde's time *two* roads led away from the Parsonage in an easterly direction, one apparently direct to the village centre and the church and the other in a more south-easterly direction. These two roads (see 'A') are clearly shown on a map published in 1797 following surveys during the period 1790-92 (2), and on the map at the Norfolk Record Office (1) which is unfortunately undated. The triangular area between these two roads is shown (1) divided into three little fields: "The Croft" (Divers Owners); "the Croft Pightle" (E. L. Lombe Esq.); and "Little Field" (Divers Owners). The last-named runs alongside the road from Weston to Weston Green. An "Enclosure Map" dated 1826 (3) indicates the position of the two original roads, but truncated as shown (see 'B'), and the position of the new road in the line as we know it to-day. A similar map in the archives of New College (4) explicitly names this "The New Road". Later maps such as the first edition of the Ordnance Survey of 1838 show the roads as they are now (see 'C'). Some large scale maps suggest that the line of one of the old roads, the more southerly one shown in 'A', is still indicated by the field boundary or hedge line, but I have not recently checked whether this is still in place.

In Woodforde's time the road system was thus clearly different from the one we now find and this should be taken into account as we think of the Parson making his way to and from Weston Church. The sketches I have made from the maps referred to are not precise, but are certainly accurate enough to indicate the changes which have taken place. I have assumed, but cannot be sure, that the new road was laid down at the time of the enclosure activities around 1826 and therefore post-dates Woodforde; I have no recollection of his ever referring to the making of new roads in the diary.

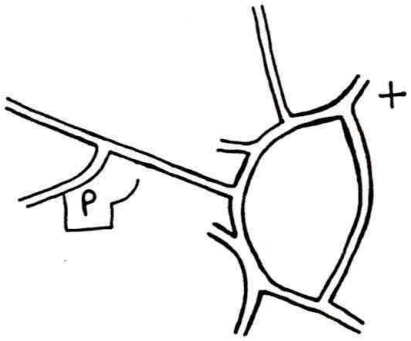
There are several maps of this area in the New College

A



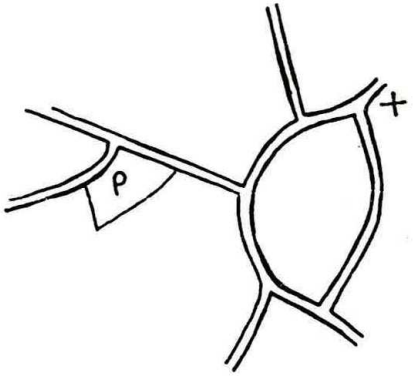
1790

B



1826

C



1838

P : Parsonage
+ : Church
* : Case's Pightle

archives, but most of them relate to College land affected by enclosure and dated 1826. A survey with maps (5) dated 1794 provides a delightful source of farmers' names, their fields and valuations, but unfortunately this related mainly to Witchingham. If members of the Society know of the whereabouts of other eighteenth or early nineteenth century maps of the village of Weston I should be most interested to hear from them.

References:

1. Norfolk Record Office, ref. NRS 4074 (undated)
2. Norfolk Record Society XLII (1975); map published 1797 by William Faden
3. Norfolk Record Office, ref. NRS 113/2 Weston Enclosure map
4. New College, Oxford, Archives Cat. No. 5348 "Inclosure Map 1826"
5. New College, Oxford, Archives Cat. No. 1654 Survey with two maps

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Nos. 1 and 3, the County Archivist, Norfolk Record Office
No. 2, the Norfolk Record Society
Nos. 4 and 5, the Warden and Scholars of New College, Oxford

A WESTON FAMILY: BIDEWELL

I remember when as an adolescent I first read the Beresford edition of the diary, it struck me that "Billy Bidewell" was a most admirable name for any member of a rural community in pre-industrial times. The owner of such a name belonged, I felt, in the same world as Hardy's rustic characters, along with Dick Dewy, Joseph Poorgrass, Susan Nunsuch and Timothy Fairways. Later research, however, makes me no longer sure that the name was pronounced in the way we should pronounce it nowadays. In the records I have found it spelled as *Biddle, Bidell, Bidwell* and *Bidle*, which suggest a rather differently spoken sound.

The Bidewells of Weston were a farming family. Some of their land abutted on the Parsonage glebe in places and may have

been freehold. We know that in 1777 Billy Bidewell was paying two different Poor Rates, one of which was designated "for his own", maybe referring to land of which he was the outright owner. From time to time Billy held one or other of the official parish appointments, proof if one were needed that at no time was he ever brought to accept parish relief, which constituted an automatic disqualification. The 1801 census shows that at that date his household consisted of 7 persons. As we shall see later, it is uncertain whether he had 5 children or only 3; if the latter supposition is correct, at least two of the people in his house must have been servants.

Although I think it is clear that he did not belong in the category of the more affluent farmers, like Mr. Girling or Stephen Andrews, we never hear of his being brought close to bankruptcy, let along suffering the financial collapse that finished off Dade and Peachman. Billy was, it is true, hard up enough in 1785 to request from the Parson the loan of "a few guineas" – which, by the way, he did not get – but this was no doubt a temporary embarrassment, and he seems never to have been late in his tithe payments. He was probably for the most part in easy enough circumstances, living with his family in a modest but comfortable way. We know little enough about him as a person. He got drunk once or twice at the "Frolicks", but that scarcely makes him at all outstanding.

Like that of nearly all the established farmers, the name first appears in the diary on 5 May 1775, during Woodforde's inspection visit to his new parish. On that day he invited the farmers to the Parsonage "to settle Tithe". He adds: "I agreed with them all but Bidewell and Burrows". At this time the head of the family was Billy's father, and it is presumably he who is mentioned in the above-cited passage. Woodforde, however, never saw him again after this meeting, because he died later in the same year. The account of his burial in the register reads:

William Bidewell Sen Nov. 6. 1775

The diarist was to have a lot of trouble in the following year with the other recalcitrant, Burrows. But no more dissension is recorded over the Bidewell tithe obligation. Presumably the sons were more amenable than the father had been.

Woodforde knew two of these. Besides another son Henry and two daughters, none of whom perhaps survived infancy, the baptismal register has "James Son of William & Ann Bidell", 2/9/1751, and "William Son of William & Ann Bidell", July 1753. (The date of the month is illegible.)

In 1776, when the Parson took up residence at Weston Longville, James Bidewell was 25, and William 23. The recent death of their father had made them independent. It was to be expected that young men in their condition should marry and start raising their own families.

On 5 November 1778 James married Anne Jeckell. Woodforde officiated at their wedding but seemingly knew little about the bride, since in the diary he calls her "one Ann Jeckells". Although the couple are noted as "both of this parish", Anne may have lived there only for the past three weeks necessary to comply with the rule about calling the banns. The Parsonage servants appear to have been in general on friendly enough terms with the local farmers, to judge by the number of times they were invited to the "harvest home" and other parties. On the day after the wedding Will Coleman left the Parsonage after breakfast, not returning until 8 o'clock in the evening – "and then in Liquor". He had been "at J^{s}. Bidewells to visit Bride &c.".

Not only do we have no comparable evidence for Billy's marriage, but it presents us with a minor mystery. In the first place he must have been married in some other parish, so all we know about his spouse is that she was named Sarah. Again, as the first children of the brothers were born just about one week from each other, it is natural to suppose that they were married at about the same time, and we might think it likely that she and her husband were of pretty much the same age.

There is, however, a burial notice for a "Sarah Bidewell", dated 5/8/1821, which gives her age as 57. If this is right, her birth must have taken place around 1764, which means that she was 15 at the time Billy's first child was born. The legal age of consent was not fixed at 16 until 1927, and in the eighteenth century girls could marry at ages well below this. But there is no

indication that such a thing happened in any of the parishes with which the diarist was concerned, and it was probably of rare occurrence. It would seem, therefore, that either Sarah's age at death as given in the register was incorrect, or the entry does not refer to Billy Bidewell's wife at all. He had a sister called Sarah or, as there is no sign that she survived beyond infancy, it is perhaps truer to say that a child of that name had been born to his parents. But the entry cannot refer to her either, since that Sarah was born in 1748.

As parents the two brothers kept level with one another in a remarkable conformity. In 1779 James and Anne had a daughter Sarah, baptized on 2 October. The name was clearly meant as a compliment to Billy's wife, who herself produced a son, John, baptized exactly a week later.

In 1781 William and Sarah were first in the field with Charles, baptized 11 June. James and Anne equalized with Samuel, baptized 3 December. (By an error in copying, this name appears in *Norfolk Diary III* as "Sarah", and the right name is here supplied from the register.) The baptism of Charles is not entered in the diary at all.

Billy had a third son, William Junior, in 1783. Then, ten whole years later, on Whit Sunday, 19 May 1793, Woodforde wrote this passage in his diary: "After the Sacrament I christned three Children, two of Billy Bidewells and one of Brigg's". None of these children is in the register of Weston baptisms under this date; and given the diarist's meticulous nature and the generally excellent state in which he kept his parochial records, it is inconceivable that he simply forgot to write the names down. The other possibility is that the passage refers to two of Billy's three children born earlier and already registered. In that case, it is difficult to see what need there was for a second christening ceremony.

The reference noted above to the baptism of James Bidewell's second child is the last in which he and his family are indubitably mentioned. We have seen on other occasions, when attempting to trace the lives of village people, that when two sons of a farmer jointly inherited the family farm, a very

commonly observed arrangement was for one of the brothers to take it while the othr moved away. Often this happened only after the two had been together for some time. Although Woodforde's personal dealings appear to have been exclusively with Billy, we know that James also was associated with the farm. If we look at the Tithe Audit attendance lists in the diary, we find that a "Bidewell", who could have been either brother, was a guest in 1776, Billy alone in 1777, 1778 and 1779, James in 1780 and both brothers in 1781; then Billy only in subsequent years because his brother had left Weston with his family. It is possible that they settled at Little Witchingham. At a much later date, on 3 August 1794, when the diarist was serving the church there for Mr. Jeans, "who is gone into Hampshire", he wrote: "We put up our Horses at M^{r}. Bidewells at Little Witchingham, very civil People indeed".

With the exception of the small number of passages, noted above, in which James is clearly specified, all the references under the name are about Billy. He sold various commodities to the Parson, mainly joints of meat, among which was one "prodigious large Leg of Pork", weighing "28. P^{d}. & 1/2" on 19 April 1777; also at various times such articles as "a fat Goose" and a sack of apples. In return he bought from Woodforde "a live fat Pigg for 1:5:0 and which he paid for immediately".

Some of the entries from Woodforde's early years as rector of Weston are of particular interest because they show the clergyman and the farmers co-operating with each other very harmoniously. For example:

> I took a Walk with Baker of my Parish who is Brother
> of my Butchers, over some Glebe Lands in the Field –
> I walked after with Billy Bidle over some more –
> I let some small Pieces of Glebe to both of them –
> – *Norfolk Diary III, 22/11/1776.*

The reference is to the still unenclosed Weston Great Field. Again:

> We breakfasted, dined, supped & slept again at home
> Sowed the Sides of my great Pond with grass Seeds this

morning & covered half with Sand brought on Purpose
from Sandy Hill – But the Storm was so very heavy
that it washed Seed & Sand all into the Pond, so
that after Dinner I sent to Billy Bidewell to desire
him to give me Leave to cut some Turf upon a
little Piece of Ground of his near Car-Cross which
he did and we immediately began upon it and
laid out one Cart Load of Turf on the Sides of the great p:
before Supper and it looks exceeding well –

Relations, indeed, do seem to have been good. I think that Woodforde was popular enough with his parishioners in the early years of his incumbency. No doubt after 40 years of Dr. Ridley with his occasional visits in the more clement time of year, it made a pleasant change to have a real resident parson. Later, when the novelty had worn off somewhat, and Woodforde himself became perhaps less actively occupied in parish affairs, he may have been not so well regarded.

The two were associated also in another way. All the men who were farming upon any sort of scale owned carts. The diary shows how often Woodforde put these vehicles of his rural neighbours to all sorts of uses. In December 1784, when poor Molly Dade was dying, her sister Betty went with Ben "in a cart of Bidewells" over to Mattishall to see her. Perhaps in this case Billy had some business of his own in Mattishall and offered the Parsonage servants a lift there and back.

Over four years later, Billy Bidewell offered to bring the Parson's newspapers from Norwich, and also to call for any letters which might be awaiting him at the Post Office. He continued to do this, or to have it done, for the next ten years. The form of words gradually changes from "Bidewell" to "Bidewell's People". This could mean either Billy's wife and elder sons, or servants in his employ. Occasionally they are replaced as carrier by Betty Cary of the village shop.

The discontinuance of this arrangement gives rise to another small mystery. On 19 January 1799 Woodforde wrote for the last time: "Bidewells People brought our News to day". The weather that winter, and well on into the spring, was bitterly cold with heavy snowfalls, and it is possible that the delivery of

the letters and newspapers was interrupted here and there. For some time the diarist simply noted that they "came to hand", without specifying the person who had brought them. By 6 April he had found a successor to the Bidewells: "My Butcher's Man, Peter, brought our Mail for us –".

The butcher was William Stoughton, a successor to Mr. Baker of former days. On 31 August of this year, Woodforde wrote down a passage which reveals that even now, in his weakened and invalid state, he still retained his old interest in people:

> . . . Mrs. Stoughton (our Butchers Wife) brought
> our Newspapers for us from Norwich this Aft: early –
> She came in a Cart – her Life, half a Year ago,
> before she left Norwich Hospital, was looked
> upon worth little or nothing and now able to
> go to Norwich Market – I was very glad of it –

Her husband was less satisfactory: "No Newspapers brought to us this Day from Norwich – Our Butcher, Stoughton, I suppose got drunk and forgot them – It is very teazing but can't help it" – a locution which we might translate into modern idiom as "it can't be helped". (*Diary, 30 August 1800).* On 2 December 1801 the newspapers arrived very late, "and very negligent of our Butcher, Stoughton, who had the care of them – I am afraid he is doing badly". But the diarist never went back for this service to Billy Bidewell, whose further appearances in the diary are limited to a mention of his attendance at the tithe-feasts, and his activity in coursing. Like many farmers of the time, Billy kept greyhounds of his own, and turns up once or twice in this part of the diary, accompanied as a sportsman by another farmer, Mr. Emeris.

Once the diary ends, if we wish to go on with our story, we have only the fragmentary notice of the parish register. We can no longer see how the people lived, only when they died.

William Bidewell was buried on 17/10/1810, aged 58. James Bidewell, another of the absentees who returned at the very last, was buried at Weston on 24/3/1821, aged 70. His wife Anne survived him for another 16 years and was buried on 2/3/1837, aged 91.

The younger William Bidewell, Billy's third son, was buried on 14/1/1845, and yet another "Sarah" on 4/5/1852. It appears reasonable to suppose that she was this William's daughter, since he was the only one of Billy Bidewell's children to be buried in the parish. But once more the dates do not fit. She died according to the register at the age of 54, which means she was born around 1798, when he was only 15. Also, there is no record of a "Sarah Bidewell" baptized in that year, or at any time near it.

(– ed.)

*

CORRECTION

In an article published in the last Journal there was an allusion to a "Keziah", a member of the Bushell family, who was baptized on 30/6/1783 at the Parsonage. I rather too hastily assumed that she was the child of a Dinah Bushell who appears as the mother of two more children, both illegitimate. I may perhaps plead that it was the diarist himself who misled me, since what he wrote was:

> I privately named a Child this morning of Dinah Bushell's by name – Keziah – One of Job's Daughters Names –

But there were two Dinahs: the mother who was the wife of William Bushell, and her unmarried daughter. A glance at the register for this baptism shows William entered as the father, so clearly it was the elder Dinah who was Keziah's mother. The next child, Robert, had the same parentage. Only Honor was the illegitimate child of the younger Dinah. This clears up the anomaly that less than 13 years separated the baptism of the younger Dinah from that of Keziah. I had accounted for this by assuming that the christening of the former took place some years after her birth. Here, then, is a salutary reminder that the researcher who takes refuge in guessing always goes wrong, sooner or later. (– ed.)

BRITISH DIARISTS OF THE EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY: NO. XI – MRS. THRALE

Thraliana: the Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale, (later Mrs. Piozzi) 1776-1809. Edited by Katherine C. Balderston. 2nd. Edition, 1961. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

What a dear, delightful person she was! I have always wanted to meet her.

– Professor Sir Walter Raleigh

*

. . . a woman essentially vain, vulgar and false, intolerable as a parent and rightly kept at a distance by her offspring.

– Lord Lansdowne

*

Quot modis mecum, quid agat, requiro,
Thralia dulcis?

Seu viri curas, pia nupta, mulcet,
Seu fovet mater sobolem benigna
Sive cum libris novitate pascit
Sedula mentem.

– Samuel Johnson

*

Sir, she has done every thing wrong, since Thrale's bridle was off her neck.

– Samuel Johnson

Part I. Early Years, and First Marriage

By a coincidence Hester Lynch Salusbury was born, at a farmhouse known then and still known as *Bodvel Hall,* about three miles north-west of Pwllheli on the Lleyn Peninsula, exactly seven months to the day after Parson Woodforde, on 16 January 1740/1. Apparently misled like so many others by the contradictions between Old Style and New Style dating, she seems often to have imagined that she was born in 1740. This is likely to have been the reason why, when she wished to celebrate what she thought was her 80th. birthday by holding a

great ball in Bath, she chose the year 1820, when she was in fact 79. On the other hand, it is possible that she, at least sometimes, like Johnson, counted her birthdays forward: i.e. in 1820 she was 79 but had her 80th. birthday, the beginning of her 80th. year, then. Woodforde did this also.

She was a well-connected "daughter of Wales", as her biographer James Clifford called her, although the genealogy she made out for herself, claiming descent from a wholly mythical "Adam of Salzburg", is nonsense. The reality is impressive enough. Her direct ancestress was Katherine of Berain, called *Mam Cymru* or "Mother of Wales", the granddaughter of an illegitimate son of Henry VII and recognised by Queen Elizabeth I as her cousin. She made four marriages, each to a member of an important Welsh family. Hester's father John Salusbury was descended from Sir Richard Clough, the second husband, and was born heir to the estate of Bach-y-Graig in what used to be Denbighshire. Her mother was a descendant of Katherine's first husband Sir John Salusbury, although her maiden name was Hester Maria Cotton; she was the sister of Sir Robert Cotton of Llewenny Hall. Their marriage took place early in 1738/9, and the mother-in-law of the bride, Lucy Salusbury, sent her a letter of thanks "for taking poor Jack, without which he could not have lived".

The words give a clue as to the nature of John Salusbury. He was indeed a sort of *Rake's Progress* character, improvident and wasteful, filled with inflated notions of his own gentility and with a violent temper as well. What liquid assets his wife possessed went towards paying off some of his most pressing debts, and in the circumstances Bodvel Hall, rented from Sir Thomas Hanmer, one of the early commentators of Shakespeare, and provided with furniture from Lucy Salusbury's home, was the best that could be hoped for. Here, as Mrs. Thrale wrote long afterwards, her mother "made her own Candles, iron'd her own Linen & her Husband's & mine, & if he wd. have been but good humor'd protested that she shd. have been happy". In 1745 on the death of his mother John inherited the Bach-y-Graig estate with its six story brick house that the locals in Mrs. Thrale's time thought had been built by a

demon. But the property was so heavily mortgaged that it was more of a liability than an asset.

It is not at all surprising that both parents found that their main interest lay in the little girl who was bright and precocious. She wrote afterwards that she became their "Plaything", and added: "They had taught me to read, & speak, & think, & translate from the French, till I was half a Prodigy". More importantly, they instilled into her a very high, possibly exaggerated notion of her own abilities.

Upon his marriage John lost no time in quarrelling furiously with his brother-in-law Sir Robert Cotton, who had voiced his disapproval of the match. Sir Robert was married but childless; and remained fond of his sister. He had a younger brother, but opposing *his* marriage too, had broken off relations with him. At length a reconciliation was patched up between Hester's parents and Sir Robert. He took greatly to the little girl, nicknamed her "Fiddle" and, after she had paid a visit to him at Llewenny Hall, allowed her and her mother to stay at his London house. It is difficult to estimate just how much trust we ought to place in Mrs. Thrale's narrative of these events; but it appears that he promised to make a Will, in which she would be generously treated, even perhaps made his heir. But he died suddenly and intestate in 1747, the property going to his brother Sir Lynch Cotton. This is the first of the lost inheritances, about which Mrs. Thrale had so much to say in later years.

John Salusbury had a younger brother named Thomas, who was like him at Trinity Hall, Cambridge, where he took the degree of Ll.B. in 1734 and the law doctorate in 1740. He was a Fellow of Trinity Hall from 1731 to 1751. Then he went to London, where he practised at Doctor's Commons. Thomas Salusbury was as extravagant as his mother and brother and also, we are told, of an "indolent" disposition; but he lived in an epoch when lucrative offices were not hard to procure, for those who happened to be in the right place at the right time. He became King's Advocate, chancellor of the diocese of St. Asaph and commissary to the dean and chapter of St. Paul's. Mrs. Thrale says that his earnings amounted to £700 a year

although, she adds rather waspishly, "he never had Money to lend his Brother". Finally Thomas scooped a matrimonial jackpot and was made for life.

Doctor's Commons was among other things the seat of the Admiralty Court, and one of the judges of that court was Sir Henry Penrice, "a famous Miser tho' a literary Man". Through his marriage to an heiress he owned Offley Place, in Hertfordshire. Long widowed, he had an only daughter, Anna Maria Penrice. She stammered and "had a confirmed Epilepsy", although at the same time she was "plump and fair and... upon the whole agreable [sic] enough in her Person". She married Thomas Salusbury in 1751. Penrice thereupon retired and Thomas succeeded to the judgeship and the knighthood that went with it.

Meanwhile John Salusbury, who had been since 1749 in the colony of Nova Scotia, whither he had gone in the hope of making his fortune, returned after a long round of squabbling with his companions, as poor as when he went out. While he had been away his wife and daughter lived penuriously in London lodgings or went to stay as poor relations with various members of the clan. Their fortunes revived when Thomas and his wife, the sickly but generous Lady Salusbury, took notice of them. On 31 May 1751 she wrote to her sister-in-law: "... you will always be welcome here, when, and as often, and for how long, or little time as you please, and I beg of you to make no ceremony, for it makes no difference to me".

As for Hester, if we can believe her story, she was as totally a favourite at Offley Park as she had once been with Sir Robert Cotton. It is true that Thomas Salusbury did not yet possess the wealth of Offley, since everything he had married into was firmly settled upon his wife, and there seems never to have been any mention of offering money to the John Salusburys or their daughter. But in 1759 the lady died and left all her possessions unconditionally to her husband. Hester was now living permanently at Offley and, if she did not exaggerate, was generally looked upon as Sir Thomas' adopted daughter. It was rumoured that he would settle £30,000 on her when she married.

But another visitor had already turned up at Offley Park, who was to prove fatal to all her hopes and rob her, as she undoubtedly believed, of her second inheritance. Years before, Thomas Salusbury had been in love with a girl named Sarah Burroughs, and they were used to meet under a particular tree in Offley Park, where they "plighted their troth", swearing undying fidelity to one another. This romantic vision is pleasantly commemorated in a charming monument by Nollekens in Offley Church. But neither of the lovers had any money, so they had perforce to part. Sarah married the Hon. William King. Now a widow, she took a house near Offley and swam back into Sir Thomas' life. Between the John Salusburys and the widow it was war to the knife, and in the contest it was she who held by far the best weapon, since no sooner had he seen her than Sir Thomas' old passion revived. It became abundantly clear both that the widow King would marry him and that she would see to it that Hester was practically disinherited. Another family row, or series of rows, now took place, and Hester left Offley and went with her parents back to London. In the winter of 1762 all three were living together in Masefield Street, Soho.

Hester was now nearly 22. She was a small girl, under five feet in height; not a beauty but with a brisk and vivacious manner that was in itself attractive. She was still quite unawakened emotionally. She had some affection for her tutor, Dr. Arthur Collier, with whom she maintained a relationship quite like that which she was to have with Johnson in later years. Collier was much her senior, a man in his fifties. He directed her education, talked about intellectual topics to her, was to some extent a surrogate father-figure and, again like Johnson, was much more deeply involved with her than she ever was with him. At this time Collier was engaged in endlessly protracted negotiations with Sir Thomas Salusbury, trying to induce the knight to make a settlement upon her.

She was intelligent, she had a flair for languages, with a glib facility for producing the conventional verse of the time that she and others mistook for a true poetic gift, and she could write amusingly upon all manner of subjects, as the *Thraliana*

shows. Johnson said once that her learning was that of a schoolboy in one of the lower forms. That may well be true, but she did not have, any more than any other woman of her time, the advantages of a systematic education. Half in real delight at her precocity, half in deliberate exploitation of her talents, using her as a way of flattering the particular rich man – Sir Robert Cotton, Sir Thomas Salusbury – they were trying to coax into generosity, her parents had made her what she was. Such a regime might have produced a wretched neurotic woman, endlessly dissatisfied and complaining about life's injustices. But there was nothing tragic about Mrs. Thrale. She had a huge appetite for living, and could find something to enjoy even in the contemplation of her own misfortunes, of which she was to experience many.

An attractive young girl who seemed to have at least a possibility of one day inheriting an estate valued at £150,000 was not likely to be without suitors. Her father's attitude may be gauged by an insane kind of letter he wrote to one of them, James Marriott, a lawyer and a poet of sorts who eventually became Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University:

> Sir
>
> My Daughter shewed me an extraordinary Letter from you; she resents the ill treatment as conscious that she never gave any pretence to take such liberties with Her. I think it hard that insolence and impudence should be suffered to interrupt the tranquil state of Youth and innocence.
>
> I therefore insist on no altercations – no more trash on the subject: But should you continue to insult my poor child, I do assume the Father. I shall take the Insult to myself; – be then most certainly Assured that I will be avenged on you – much to the detriment of your Person and – So help me God.
>
> John Salusbury.

In one of her own effusions Hester had written a line that goes: "When easy Marriott tunes his vocal lyre". The threats being too much for his pretensions, Marriott faded out precipitately. He got his own back later, for he kept the letter and sent it to Hester after the death of her father. But a much more determined challenger now entered the lists, who had a much

more important advantage than could be conferred by a lyre, however vocal it may have been. This was Henry Thrale, with whose name hers will always be joined for posterity. In fact, in spite of her calling herself and signing her name "H. L. Piozzi" for nearly 40 years, she is lastingly famous as *Mrs. Thrale, the friend of Dr. Johnson.*

She herself, and Boswell, tended to look down upon the modest middle-class origins of the Thrales, and to represent them as much poorer and meaner than they seem to have been in reality. Some time about the middle of the seventeenth century a boy named Edmund Halsey, son of a miller at St. Albans, went to London and became an apprentice at the Old Anchor Brewery in Southwark. He did well, married the owner's daughter, and took over the business. This prospered to such an extent that Halsey was able to marry his own daughter to Richard Temple, Lord Cobham, the creator of the famous gardens at Stowe. He inherited Halsey's brewhouse and sold it for £30,000 to his wife's cousin, Ralph Thrale.

Ralph had started as a worker in the brewery, and according to Boswell he was there for 20 years at a wage of six shillings a week. This is certainly incorrect, since a surviving account book shows that he was already earning £1 a week in 1693. But how he came to lay his hands upon the large sum required to purchase the brewing business is not certainly known. Mrs. Thrale's suggestion, that he paid for it out of his savings, is surely impossible. Presumably he borrowed the money, and another source says that he was able to pay it off in the space of 11 years. It is also said that part of the debt was settled by regular supplies of porter delivered to Stowe.

The new proprietor went on to make a considerable fortune, entered Parliament in 1741, and built the country mansion at Streatham which was to be so intimately associated with Johnson. Brewing was of course one of the basic trades which go back in origin to tthe dawn of human history. All over the country village publicans made their own ale, beer and porter, as well as the private citizens who brewed for the use of their own households, like Parson Woodforde. But in the cities this

traditional commerce had been overtaken by large scale brewing concerns which sold to the huge number of licensed drink-sellers. Ralph Thrale was one of these great London brewers.

His only son Henry was born about 1729 to the expectation of wealth. He may have been at Eton – the registers are missing for the time he was perhaps there – and matriculated from University College, Oxford, in 1744. Leaving without a degree, which he had no need of, he made the "grand tour" of Europe and then settled down to a life of pleasure. However, when his father died in 1758, Henry Thrale took over the active management of the brewery. At the time he met Hester Salusbury he was a rich young business man, trying also to secure a seat in Parliament. He may have somewhat impressed her as being quite unlike the mainly academic and literary personages, such as Marriott and Collier, who had hitherto composed her circle of acquaintance.

It was over Thrale that her parents fell out. Mrs. Salusbury had plainly had enough of genteel poverty and wanted something better for her daughter. Although Sir Thomas Salusbury did not marry again until November 1763, after Hester's own marriage, he was clearly receding fast from view as his niece's benefactor. Thrale was rich enough to take her without an inheritance, if sufficiently attracted. Therefore her mother strongly favoured his suit. On the other hand John Salusbury had taken an intense dislike to the man, and swore that he would not see his child "exchanged for a bottle of porter". Long afterwards Hester wrote of the "Visits from Mr. Thrale – to my Mother – render'd more terrifying every day from Papa's violence of temper".

It all ended in the sort of fatal explosion that might have been predicted. On 17 December 1762 Collier sent a note in Latin to Hester, to say that "Sir Thomas would certainly marry Mrs. King the Sunday following – and beg'd I would not say a Syllable till the next Day, when he would come, & break the dreadful Tydings". But John Salusbury, who sensed that something was being kept from him, imagined that the note was really a clandestine letter to her from Thrale. A terrible row followed,

which ended with his beseeching his daughter's pardon, after he had seen what the note contained; ". . . and in this fond Misery spent we the Hours till 4 o'clock in the Morning".

She was to experience many such emotional storms and upheavals in her life, being indeed one of the kind of people who thrive on rows. But for her father it was one row too many. He had been flying into ungovernable rages for years, and was no doubt a heavy drinker also. His body, his brain, would not take any more. A few hours later he suffered a fulminating stroke "& was brought us home a Corpse".

What happened next recalls the very cynical observation of Proust, that one person's death always makes things easier for someone else. Mrs. Salusbury could now go ahead with her plans for the Thrale marriage. Collier was against the match, for much the same reasons that Johnson had to be against Hester's marriage to Piozzi years later; so Collier was ruthlessly swept aside. On the back of a letter kept by her she wrote: "The last I ever rec^{d}. from D^{r}. Collyer as my Mother would not permit me to answer it or see the D^{r}. anymore". It is just possible that if Sir Thomas Salusbury had come up with a settlement for her, she might have refused Thrale, or at least to have put up some kind of resistance to her mother's desire to see her married to him. But in fact it was not until her forthcoming marriage had been announced that Sir Thomas gave her a bond for £10,000, and then only as the result of negotiations with Thrale. The wedding took place at St. Anne's church, Soho, on 11 October 1763.

Posterity, or at least that small part of it which interests itself in the elucidation of such matters, has always been curious about the Thrales' marriage, because of what they felt or did not feel for one another has a bearing upon the relationship both had with Johnson, he being one of those figures who from his own time to ours has always commanded attention. Because of this, there are many different accounts of Hester's married life, ranging all the way from admirers who simply re-state her own point of view to traducers so violently hostile that the evident bias in what they write vitiates their case.

In the first place, it is evident that she never felt for Thrale anything like the passionate devotion she was later to lavish on her "caro sposo", Piozzi. Although steadfastly refusing ever to blame her mother's conduct, she knew well enough that she had been more or less sold to Thrale. The sexual conventions of the time, encouraging absolute passivity in the wife, had the unfortunate effect of producing or increasing callousness on the part of the husband, who was not expected to consider her feelings. So, when she writes of Thrale that he was "little tender of my person", we know exactly what she means, while recognising the unusual quality of her outspokenness. Between September 1764 and June 1778, just under 14 years, she gave birth to twelve children, besides having two miscarriages. This appalling sequence, which was literally fatal to many of the children, means that during what has always been regarded as the most interesting part of her life, the time of her friendship with Johnson, she was almost continuously pregnant. Johnson also exploited her in his own way, keeping her up night after night to talk to him and make endless pots of tea, for he was a man who hated to be alone.

Human relationships are always more complex than the simplistic patterns of behaviour we tend to imagine or invent, to make them easier to understand. One could write off Thrale as simply one more obtuse husband who could see his wife only in terms of sharply defined feminine roles: bringing up his children and running his household, as a hostess at parties, and in bed. But there was more to it than that. Undoubtedly he was proud of Hester's intelligence, as she acknowledged, however disinclined he may have been to share the intellectual pursuits she loved. It was surely to please her that he brought Johnson into the household and opened his doors to other distinguished people, such as Reynolds, Goldsmith and Burke, who formed part of Johnson's circle of friends.

This being so, we cannot accept her later statements, that Johnson was no more than a burden which her husband put on her. That notion is contradicted by everything she said and wrote at the time. For, just as without any deep affection for Thrale her letters and diaries show her as contented enough

with her lot in the early years of her marriage, Johnson who became part of her familiar world in those years was likewise accepted. And more than just accepted: immeasurably flattered by her friendship with so famous a man, she did everything in her power to honour him. He became one of the family, with a room of his own at Streatham, another in the house adjoining the brewery which she hated so much; and he was their companion in the tours they made of North Wales and France. The joking convention by which Mr. Thrale became "my Master" and Mrs. Thrale "my Mistress", while it must have misled many people unacquainted with eighteenth century idioms into a wholly erroneous belief that Johnson and she were lovers, is in itself a testimony to the intimacy of their friendship.

The reasons why Johnson respected Thrale so highly as we know he did are not altogether clear. It is obvious that he was no scholar, and far from possessing the love of argument and the conversational skill of the Johnsonians. In the conversations recorded by Boswell, Frances Burney and others Thrale, although often present, takes little or no part. Johnson himself, pressed on the subject, made his famous remark to the effect that Thrale was like a watch that had no minute hand but told the hours very well! Naturally the more ill-natured people said that he spent so much of his time with the Thrales for the sake of the more than comfortable accommodation and rich food he was given by them. That was no doubt a consideration, in a man who had known so much poverty and discomfort in his early life, but it is very far from being the whole story.

Johnson made the acquaintance of the Thrales at a time of great psychic crisis, when he was beset by terror that he was going mad. Mrs. Thrale never forgot that early meeting when he talked so wildly and desperately that her husband involuntarily lifted his hand to stop the other man's mouth. Johnson had great loyalty to his friends, and his affection for Thrale had its origin in gratitude.

As to his feelings for Hester, there can be no doubt that he loved her, was in love with her, although his strict sense of sexual morality would never have allowed him to admit it, and

the often rude, harsh and bitter words he spoke to her must seem like a defence against the conscious acceptance of what he felt for her. With all this she was also the beloved friend whose kindness "for twenty years soothed a life radically wretched". And when at last everything changed, and he saw her slipping away from him, his language was the pleading of a rejected lover: "Do not, do not, drive me from you, for I have deserved neither your neglect nor your hatred".

(– to be continued)

NOTES AND QUERIES

The following letter has been received from Dr. David Case:

We were not informed who wrote the review – *Journal XVIII, 3, pp. 39-44* – on *A Country Parson: James Woodforde's Diary 1759-1802 – Century Publishing/OUP, 1985.* I found the review rather harsh.

The publishers made the claim that in this edition they had "the intention of making Woodforde much more accessible to the general reader". The reviewer, however, implied that this was a mere "coffee-table book" for the "distraction of an idle moment". No updating of the editorial material had been attempted, a list of errors was given and we were even reminded that the reference to the Bodleian Library catalogue was omitted. Five and a half pages of detailed criticism . . .

Is all this scholarly criticism really justified? The publication is a mere dip into Woodforde and the concept of linking this with paintings and drawings of the Norfolk scene was a novel one. How is the casual reader to be allowed a glimpse of a complex subject? How is the man in the street to be shown a little of a subject which may be totally new to him? How would one do the same for Shakespeare, astronomy or atomic physics? Any such abbreviated glimpse into a complex subject will be wide open to the various criticisms of the specialist, the scholar, the expert in the topic concerned. But we can't all be scholars. Those of us

who are very close to a specialist subject must accept that any superficial or general-interest treatment of the material may not satisfy us. But then it wasn't intended for us in the first place.

I regret to announce that most of my relatives probably would not care to read Woodforde from cover to cover, but they may well happily dip into this illustrated sample. (They wouldn't be upset that the Bodleian reference had been omitted.) If by this process some of my visitors learn more about Woodforde by finding this latest publication on my coffee-table, then so much the better. Members of the Parson Woodforde Society are addicts to their subjects; we mustn't for that reason deny others an occasional taste. In his introduction to the 1935 edition Beresford wrote:

> . . . five volumes, while well enough for students, for libraries, and for Woodforde disciples, are a trifle daunting to the ordinary person, particularly if the reading of books is not his principal occupation in life. Moreover, now that Woodforde has established himself . . . there is much to be said for a quintessence of him for Everyman.

Can't we accept that this latest dip into Woodforde is for the 1986 Everyman? What I did find regrettable was that the Society did not even get a mention. If there are potential new addicts out there we may have been denied the chance of contacting them.

Lastly however, and in an attempt to be more constructive, let me ask how the Committee of the Parson Woodforde Society would themselves construct a 1986 Woodforde for Everyman. How would they make selections from the diary? How would they set out to make the material lively and interesting? Or is Woodforde perhaps just not for Everyman? How about an essay competition (say 1200 words or about three pages in the Journal) for members, the essays to be entitled *Woodforde and his diary,* and to be written as though for inclusion in a widely circulated magazine or periodical.

THE REV. ROBERT SMITH

It is with the deepest regret that I have to announce the death of the Rev. Robert Smith, late of Ipswich. He retired so recently as October last, and went with his wife to live at Beeston, Notts. (This will be familiar to members, at least by name, since it was the home, when he was not wandering up and down the countryside, of the Parson's famous "poor relation", James Lewis.) However, he had been there only a short time when he became ill and was admitted to hospital, where he died in November.

Mr. Smith was a great tower of strength to the Society, having corrected the last three volumes of the diary with the most meticulous care and accuracy. I was looking forward to enjoying the benefits of his collaboration on *Ansford IV.* He will be very much missed.

I am sure that members will join with me in expressing our sincere although belated condolences to Mrs. Jean Smith in her sad bereavement. (ed.)

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