

Arcadian
Club
SCARNING



Newsletter May 2001 No.6

In Brief.



It is gratifying to realise that members of our group do not fall asleep at our half-yearly meetings. Proof of this follows our November get together when I passed the comment that I had seen a reasonable copy of 'Arcady' in a bookshop in Burnham Market signed by Augustus Jessopp, but priced at £45 - rather expensive.

Ken and Sue Rockley made a mental note of this when the P.C.C. were turning over in their minds a suitable present for the departing Rev. David Roper. They immediately considered that if this book was still for sale, it would be a very appropriate parting gift to remind the Rev. Roper of his stay in the Dereham Group of Parishes written by one of his illustrious predecessors on life in Arcady, or Scarning, over one hundred years ago.

This is the only copy of 'Arcady' I have seen on the shelves of Antiquarian bookshops in Norfolk, mine came from as far afield as York.

At the other end of the scale, Jean and I were browsing in the Sue Ryder Charity shop in Little Walsingham just prior to Christmas and looking through some old books I discovered a copy of 'The Coming of the Friars' priced £1 and of course, although I had a copy, I purchased it and have subsequently passed it on to Fred as a Christmas present.

Fortunately, Norfolk is blessed with some interesting Antiquarian Bookshops, apart from the one in Burnham Market already mentioned. There is one in Holt, two or three in Norwich and my favourite, David Ferrow's Antiquarian Emporium in Gt. Yarmouth just behind Palmer's Departmental Store on the Market Place.



Indeed, David Ferrow is almost as Antiquarian as the books he sells, having been in the business in Yarmouth for 61 years. I was there a couple of days before Christmas and noticed a popular edition of 'One Generation of a Norfolk House', two copies of 'Random Roaming' and one other whose title has escaped my notice.

The shop in Norwich I particularly like browsing in, is the old St. Michael's at Plea redundant Church at the top of Queen Street opposite Mills and Reeves offices. Not only can you browse through old books, but look at small antiques and have a snack or light meal in the former Chancel of this attractive old church.

Norwich is to be congratulated on the way it uses its old redundant churches for social purposes and St. Michael's at Plea is no exception.

The other bookshop in Norwich, usually with a Jessopp or two, is the Tombland Bookshop opposite the entrance to the Cathedral, an appropriate setting for such a shop reflecting the connection between the Church and literature.

As our good friend Ron Fiske knows, looking for old books with a Norfolk flavour can be an expensive pastime.

Since the loss of Norfolk books in the Norwich Library fire a few years ago the Norfolk Library Service has been busy buying up such items of historical interest to replenish their lost books, leaving choices on the ground extremely limited and as a result, increasingly more expensive.

So if you are looking for a Jessopp or any other old book, here's *good hunting*, also don't forget that Car Boot sales are also fertile grounds for the book collector. I have picked up some really good bargains this way.

Norwich Public Library

READERS' GUIDE

(ISSUED BI-MONTHLY).

City Librarian - - - GEO. A. STEPHEN, F.L.A.

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MAY, 1914

NOTES.

This number of THE READERS' GUIDE contains the third portion of the Catalogue of the Biography section of the Lending Library, which is devoted to biographies of persons whose surnames commence with the letters G to P, and a classified list of books recently added to the Library. The number of volumes in the present section of the Biography Catalogue is 736, of which 12 volumes are specially suitable for juvenile readers; the latter are distinguished by the letter J prefixed to the book-numbers.

The next issue of THE READERS' GUIDE will contain the fourth and concluding portion of the Catalogue of books in the Biography section of the Lending Library, and a list of new books.

One of the most famous East Anglians of the Victorian Era was Dr. AUGUSTUS JESSOPP, schoolmaster, rector, author and antiquary, whose portrait and autograph are herein reproduced from the third edition of his valuable and scholarly work entitled "One generation of a Norfolk House," by the kindness of the publisher, Mr. T. Fisher Unwin. Augustus Jessopp was born at Cheshunt, Herts., on 20th December, 1823. He was educated at St. John's College, Cambridge, of which he subsequently became an Honorary Fellow. At the age of 24 he married Mary Ann Cotesworth, he was curate of Papworth St. Agnes, Cambridgeshire, from 1848 to 1854, Headmaster of Helston Grammar School, Cornwall, from 1855 to 1859, when he was appointed Headmaster of King Edward VI. School, Norwich, a post he held until 1879. During his long Headmastership at Norwich he effected reforms in the school buildings, he proved his ability as a successful master, and by his kindness to the scholars he endeared himself to them. In 1879 he became Rector of Scarning, Norfolk, where he remained until 1911, worthily fulfilling the duties of a country clergyman. He was select preacher of the University of Oxford in 1896, an Hon. Canon of Norwich Cathedral, Chaplain-in-Ordinary to King Edward VII., and sometime Honorary Secretary of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society—an appointment secured by his antiquarian research. His most popular works are "Arcady," a fascinating picture of rural life, the complementary volume "Trials of a country parson," and "One generation of a Norfolk House," which deals with Henry Walpole, giving a vivid picture of the Elizabethan period. A list of his works in the Norwich Public Library is given below. It was chiefly at Scarning that he wrote his books and articles, winning thereby a high reputation for his literary skill and his antiquarian knowledge. His writings are characterised by their easy, lucid, and polished style, and are rendered attractive by their author's delightful sense of humour and his popular method of presentment.

We are indebted to Mr. Ron Fiske for the excellent photograph of Dr Augustus Jessopp which appeared in his book 'One Generation of a Norfolk House' published by T. Fisher Unwin and the summary of his life as it appeared in the Norwich Public Library Reader's Guide in May 1914 (the year in which he died.)



From Dr. Augustus Jessopp's "One Generation of a Norfolk House" (76 net), by the kindness of Mr. T. Fisher Unwin.



Rolls of the Manor Courts

In his essays, Dr. Jessopp occasionally refers to the value and importance of the Rolls of the Manor Courts in researching the past. The following is therefore based on his explanation of their importance, given in his essay 'The Black Death in East Anglia.

'In the thirteenth century it may be said that *in theory* all the land belonged to the sovereign. The sovereign had indeed assigned large tracts of territory to A or B or C but in certain circumstances these tracts came back into the hands of the sovereign and were re-granted by him at his will to whom he chose. In return for such grants A or B or C were bound to perform certain services in recognition that they were *tenants* of the king. They were called *tenants in chief*.

The tenant in chief had his castle or mansion but was necessarily a non-resident landlord farming his possessions through the agency of a bailiff or letting them out. He could not sell the land but could sublet it to a tenant who in his turn was bound to render services to his over lord. It was inevitable as time went by that the sub-tenant regarded his estate as his own.

The process went on till it was becoming a serious difficulty to discover how the king was to get *his services*.

In the eighteenth year of King Edward I a statute was passed forming landed estates, each to be known as a manor in which the lord resided. Sub-tenants held their land under the lord and paid him rents and gave services. At certain intervals the sub-tenants were bound to appear before their lords and give accounts of themselves;



bound to show cause why they had not performed their services; bound to pay their rents whether in money or kind. But above all, to pay a fine where small patches of land had changed hands including inheritance.

If a tenant died, the lord laid claim to some of his livestock and in all manors, if a man died without heirs, his land was taken over by the lord.

These periodical meetings at which all this business was transacted were called the *Courts* of the Manor and the Records of these Courts were kept on long rolls of parchment with exceeding and most jealous scrupulousness. Every tiller of the soil who occupied a piece of land, however small, was sure to be a tenant under some lord of the manor; when he died a *record of his death* was entered upon the *Court Rolls of the Manor*; the name of his successor was inscribed; the amount of fine set down which his heir paid for entering upon his inheritance; and if he died *without heirs* the fact was noticed, the lands which he had held being forfeited to the lord.

Thus the Court Rolls of a manor of the fourteenth century are practically registers of the deaths of all occupiers of the land within the manor.'

Dr. Jessopp goes on to give examples taken from these Court Rolls:-

'The Jurors do present that Simon Must died seized (occupying) of a Messuage and 4 acres of land in Stradset, and that he has no heir. Therefore it is fitting that the aforesaid land be taken into the hands of the lord.

Also that Matilda Stilewas she married, or single, widow or mother or maid? What cared the precise man of business on that 24th of July, 1349, as his pen moved over the parchment?Matilda Stile died seized of one acre and one rood of land held in Villenage. Therefore it is fitting that the aforesaid land be taken into the hands of the lord until such time as the heir may appear in court.



He never did appear! Next year her little estate was handed over to another. She was the last of her line.

Such entries as these swarm in the Court Rolls of this year 1349 and throw light on the dreadful plague that occurred then. Dr. Jessopp says that 'on the 1st January 1349, the King wrote to the Bishop of Winchester, informing him that although the Parliament had been summoned to meet on the 19th of the month, yet because *a sudden visitation of deadly pestilence had broken out at Westminster and the neighbourhood, which was increasing daily it had been determined to prorogue the Parliament to Monday, the 27th of April.*'

Dr. Jessopp states that the pestilence raged fiercely and reached East Anglia. In Sudbury, Lord Walsingham had two manors, one of which was called Cornard Parva. A manor court was held there on the 31st March - the number of tenants of the manor can at no time have exceeded fifty - yet at this court six women and three men are registered as having died since the last court was held two months before.

On the 1st of May another court was held, fifteen more deaths are recorded, *seven* of them without heirs. Six months later, thirty six more deaths occurred and *thirteen more households had been left without a living soul to represent them.*

At Heacham, a dispute was set down for hearing between a husband and wife on the question of a dower, to be heard by the steward and a jury. The man's name was Reginald Goscelin and his wife's name was Emma. The dispute was never settled. Before the day of hearing came on *every one* of Emma Goscelin's witnesses was dead and her husband was dead too. Four other landowners had died. One of these latter had a son and heir to succeed, but two months later the boy had gone, and the sole representative of the family was a little girl, who became straightway the ward of the lord of the manor.



In Hunstanton, it is recorded in the manor rolls, that in two months sixty-three men and fifteen women had been carried off. Upwards of eight hundred parishes lost their parsons, eighty-three of them twice, and ten of them three times in a few months.'

One can imagine the fascination that Dr. Jessopp had for the Court Manor Rolls as story after story became revealed, not only reports of the Black Death but also of the many disputes that arose in earlier times.

I give a selection of them as related by Dr Jessopp, for your consideration and would remind you as we delve into the past, that although these people had hard lives, they also must have had the same human passions and emotions as we, their successors.

'Thomas Porter had a neighbour, one John Stone, a man of small substance: he owned a couple of acres under the lord; poor land it was, hardly paying for the tillage, and I suppose the cottage upon it was his own, so far as any man's copyhold dwelling was his own in those days.

The Black Death came to that cottage among the rest, and John Stone and his wife and children, all were swept away. Nay! not all: little Marjery Stone was spared; but she had not a kinsman upon earth. Poor little maid, she was barely nine years old and absolutely alone! Who cared? Thomas Porter and his weeping wife cared, and they took little Marjery to their home, and they comforted themselves for all that they had lost (their sons and daughters had died of the plague), and the little maid became unto them as a daughter.

Henceforth life was less dreary for the old couple. But five years passed, and Marjery had grown up to be a sturdy damsel and very near the marriageable age.

Oh ho! friend Porter, what is it we have heard men tell? That when the Black Death came upon us, your house was left unto you desolate and there remained neither chick nor child. Who is this?



Then some one told the steward, or told the lord, and thereupon ensued enquiry.

What right had Thomas Porter to adopt the child?

She belonged to the lord, and he had the right of guardianship. Aye! and the right of disposing of her in marriage too. Thomas Porter, with a heavy heart, was summoned to appear. He pleaded that the marriage of the girl did not belong to the lord by right, and that on some ground or other, which is not set down, she was not his property at all.

That might have been very true or it might not, but one thing was certain. Thomas Porter had no right to her and so the invariable result followed - he had to pay a fine. What else ensued we shall never know.'

Augustus Jessopp also gives interesting examples of the many disputes between the lord and his tenants for non-payment of inheritance tax and indeed of disputes between individuals as revealed in the records of the Court Rolls. Here is a small selection which throws a fascinating light on life in bygone days.

'Henry Anneys, at Lessingham, could work on the fears of Alice Bakeman and extort a douceur from her without resorting to violence. Mrs. Bakeman had succeeded to the property of some dead kinsman, and Mr. Anneys heard of it. He called on the lady and informed her that for a consideration he would save her from paying any heriot (inheritance tax) to the lord; he had certain information which he could use either way. Finally, it was agreed that Alice should give the rogue a cow as hush money, and with the cow, Mr. Hanneys departed.

His triumph was brief. When the time came for holding the next court arrived, others came round the poor woman, and made it quite evident that the lands she had succeeded to were not heriotable at all, and that Henry Anneys was a swindler.



So the case was brought before the steward as usual, the cow was ordered to be returned, and a substantial fine imposed on Anney

Almost the first thing that strikes a novice who looks into the village history of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is the astounding frequency of bloody quarrels among the rustics.

In the records of the Courts Leet for Norfolk it is very seldom indeed, that you can find a court held at which one or more persons, male or female, are not charged with "drawing blood" from somebody. Whether it was by punching their opponents on the nose, or whether they used their knives, I hesitate to decide; but I suspect, from the frequent mention of knives and daggers, that sticking one's enemy with cold steel was not so very un-English a practice as popular prejudice is wont to assume it to be.

At Lessingham, about Christmas time, 1349 there was a free fight of a most sanguinary character, men and women joining in it freely. It seems to have arisen from some one finding a horse wandering about the deserted fields. As a stray, it belonged to the lord - the finder took a different view, somebody cried "Halves!" and somebody else said "I'll give information," and somebody else replied, "So will I," whereupon arose a bloody battle as has been told.

About the same time, at Hunstanton, Catherine Busgey, evil-disposed old hag that she was, had stript a dead man of his leather jerkin. Did she proceed to wear the manly attire that she might be dagger-proof for the next encounter? Rash woman! The dead man's friends recognised the well-known coat, it was forfeited and handed over to the lord.

It may be presumed that where a scoundrel escaped the plague altogether, while others were dying all round him, or where another recovered after being brought to death's door, in such cases the man would, as a rule be a person of exceptional strength and vigorous constitution. Such fellows, when the evil spirit was upon them, would be ugly customers to deal with.



Gilbert Henry of Tibenham was a somewhat audacious thief when he walked into John Smith's house, where there was none alive to bar the door, and carried off certain bushels of malt and barley, with other goods not specified; and not content therewith, stripped the dead man of his coat and waistcoat.

The value of these articles of apparel was not assessed very highly - only sixpence each - and Master Gilbert, after paying the price of the garments, seems to have gone away with them. It is hardly to be wondered at that neither steward nor lord greatly coveted that coat and waistcoat.

Another wretched pair—a man and his wife—had deliberately cleared a crop of oats off an acre and a half of land, and stacked it in their own barn.'

And so the sorry story goes on as related by Dr. Jessopp from his researches of Court Manor Rolls. The peasants were exceedingly poor and what would seem to us now to be petty theft was to them opportunism not to be missed. One can only sympathise with them in their daily struggle for existence.

All these accounts and many more appear in Dr. Jessopp's book 'The Coming of the Friars' and I hope I have stimulated your interest.

Fred Hoskins

A note for your diary!

The next meeting of the Arcadian Club

will be in Scarning Village Hall

on Saturday 5th May

at 7.30pm

