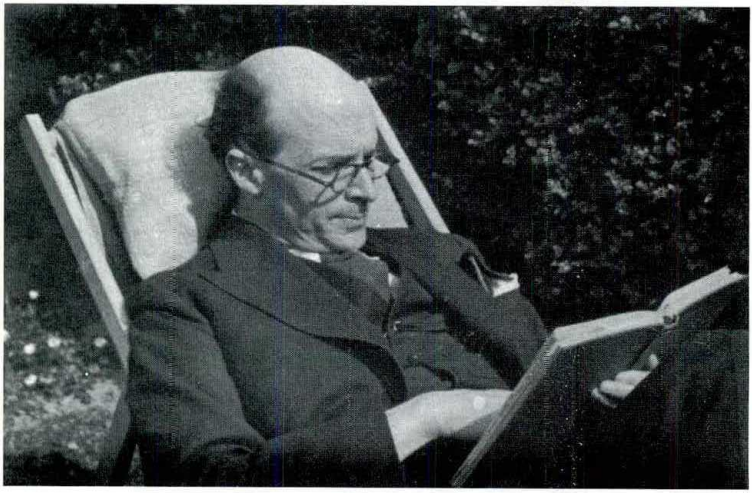
PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY

Quarterly Journal



JOHN BALDWYN BERESFORD (1888-1940)
(By kind permission of Mr Christopher Beresford)

VOL. XXXVI NO. 3 AUTUMN 2003

I should wish at no very distant date to begin a Journal. The great danger will be that I may be tempted to deal disingenuously with myself in it. If I could write an *honest* report of my own mind it would under God's blessing do me good. I date this, that if I feel indisposed to put my present resolution in hand I may be shamed into it.

Quotation from 'Bishop Jebb's Book' in
E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy,*
(1951)

ISSN 1365-327X

Issued to Members of the Parson Woodforde Society

Chairman
Dr Nigel Custance
Primrose Hill Farm
Hutton-le-Hole
North Yorkshire
YO62 6UA

Editor
Martin Brayne
Long Croft
Whitehough Head
Chinley, High Peak
SK23 6BX

Membership Secretary
Mrs Ann Elliott
22 Gaynor Close
Wymondham
Norfolk
NR18 0EA

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

I write this a week before setting out for Hampshire and in anticipation of an enjoyable and informative week-end following in the footsteps of Young Woodforde. By the time this issue of the Journal reaches you, however, the Winchester Frolic will have come and gone and plans will already be afoot to meet next year in the West Country. Thus collectively, if not individually, we shall be following Woodforde who left Winchester on 8 September 1769 after taking part in the examination of candidates for both 'Winton Coll' and New College. Having 'dined, booted and spurred' in the Election Chamber and taken dessert with the Warden, he and his colleagues

> . . . drank a Glass or two
> of Wine and then all decamped –
> I then took Horse and went immediately with my
> Man for the County of Somerset –

While not all of us will be going to Somerset with such immediacy, it will, I am sure, be the ambition of many to arrive there in time for the next annual Frolic – over the week-end of 21/23 May, 2004.

Somerset is, rightly, the favourite county of many but South Yorkshire, although only likely to be awarded pride of place by its own sterling sons and daughters, is quite scandalously neglected. Recently, under the guidance of a South Yorkshire friend and fellow Woodfordean, I visited two of the county's churches, both of outstanding interest. St Leonard's, Thrybergh – between Rotherham and Conisbrough – is dedicated to an imprisoned crusader who miraculously appeared, still in chains, at the foot of the village cross at the very moment that his forlorn wife was about to re-marry. Thrybergh was the home and St Leonard's the resting place of various Reresbys, including Sir John whose *Memoirs* are such a great resource for all interested in Restoration England. Just a few miles further south – on the road between Sheffield and Worksop – lies Aston where Thomas Gray's poet-friend William Mason, affectionately known as 'Scroddles', was rector from 1754-97. Gray seems to have enjoyed his visit to Mason's humble rectory quite as much as he relished staying with John Chute at The Vyne, describing Aston as 'an Elysium amidst the coal-pits'. The coal pits have all but disappeared but hints of Elysium survive – albeit in the midst of suburbia. All Saints church – a hive of activity during our visit – is full of interest including a fine memorial to

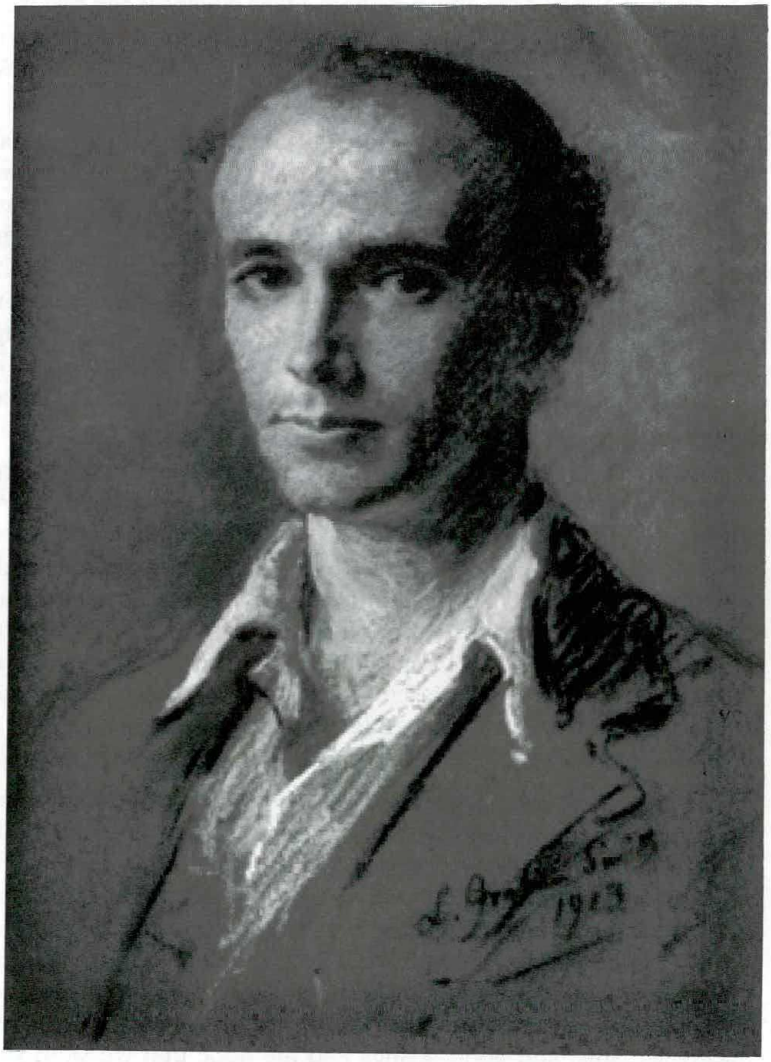
Mason for whom a new rectory was eventually built by none other than Carr of York. Alas, this new house was never visited by Gray who died in the year it was completed but Carr's summer-house in the garden contains a commemorative urn to the great elegist and it was here that Mason wrote his *Life* of the poet.

Much of this issue is devoted to an essay on Woodforde's original editor, John Beresford. Researching his life has been a most satisfying task and I can only hope that I have done justice to so esteemed a subject. Throughout all but the earliest years of his married life Beresford lived in the same house in Holland Park. Should we not, I wonder, press English Heritage for the erection of a blue plaque? This is not, I hasten to say, a question expecting the answer 'yes'. It is, however, an issue worth debating and it would certainly be useful to hear from anybody who has experience of a blue plaque campaign.

It is good to report that the Society's most recent publication, Volume 13 of *The Diary of James Woodforde*, covering the years 1791-1973, has sold especially well. Any member in doubt as to whether to purchase should read Roger Lockyer's review which appears on a later page. In addition to being a member of our Society, Roger is Emeritus Reader in History at London University and has stepped out of his usual Tudor and early Stuart range to apply his distinguished historical skills with great effect to the late eighteenth century. I am most grateful to him. News of Volume 14 in the Winter *Newsletter*.

Last, but by no means least, Nigel Custance. Nigel has been our Chairman since 1995 and a member of Committee for over 20 years. His wise counsel, clear thinking and gentle but persuasive manner will be much missed. The expression 'scholar and gentleman' might have been coined with Dr Custance in mind while his contribution to the Society can be summed up in Woodforde's own phrase 'handsome and genteel'. As he and Jo retreat to the vastness of North Yorkshire they do so with our sincerest thanks and good wishes and the hope that we shall see them again very soon.

MARTIN BRAYNE



John Beresford in 1913 by Lucy Graham-Smith
(by kind permission of Mr Christopher Beresford)

JOHN BALDWYN BERESFORD (1888-1940) – A BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

By the time the reader comes to the last entry of the fifth volume of *The Diary of a Country Parson* and reads those solemn editorial words, 'The rest of the page is blank. The Diary has come to an end', etc, he is aware that he has lost someone with whom he has for a long time been on terms of friendship, even intimacy.[1] Most readers will, no doubt, pause to reflect on that loss, to contemplate the hours so well spent in the good parson's company and to consider and be thankful for the vast and varied store of eighteenth century human experience by which they are the richer.

Eventually, going on to read the appendices which follow – on 'the problem of Dilapidations' and, especially, the 'Notes relating to the death of Parson Woodforde'[2] – we are reminded not only of Dr R. E. H. Woodforde who owned the manuscript diary and supplied the information upon which the notes are based but also, with particular gratitude, of his friend John Beresford without whose labours we should never have made the diarist's delightful acquaintance.

When the volumes of the diary originally appeared between 1924-1931 Beresford's name was one with which the book-reading and perhaps especially the poetry-loving section of the population would have been familiar. He was an up-and-coming man-of-letters – well thought of by such leading arbiters of literary taste as George Saintsbury, J. C. Squire and Edmund Gosse – whose name cropped-up with some frequency in the leading intellectual reviews of the day. Today, by contrast, despite the fame achieved by his foster child James Woodforde – the 'Country Parson' – he is all but forgotten. Yet in at least two other respects he is deserving of posterity's grateful acknowledgement. His edition of the poems of Charles Cotton3 remains the most accessible introduction to that cavalier poet's unjustly neglected work. Likewise his biography of the seventeenth century political fixer and turncoat Sir George Downing – he after whom the street was named – remains the definitive work on that deeply unattractive but important figure.4

John Baldwyn Beresford was born on 9 May 1888 at Tenby, Pembrokeshire. His parents are remembered in the dedication to the collection of essays *Storm and Peace* published in 1936:[5]

To the Memory
of
My Father and Mother,
John Jervis Beresford M.A., sometime Rector of Easton Grey, Wilts and Margaret Moreton Hollinshed, his wife, who brought up their children in the love of literature, and having endured the tempest of life, entered (she in the year 1915, he in the year 1916) the Peace of God.

John, known to his family and close friends as Jack, was the fourth of six children (two boys and four girls). Their father had been born in Calcutta, India in 1853 – the son of an employee of the I.C.S. – and was descended from the Beresfords of Beresford Dale on the Derbyshire/Staffordshire border. In infancy John Jervis had been accidentally blinded by a little brother with a pair of scissors. Although the scissors only penetrated one eye the damage could not in those days be contained and the result was total blindness. He was educated at home but, despite his handicap, was admitted pensioner, together with a younger brother, Edward, of St John's College, Cambridge, later migrating to King's from where they both graduated before moving on to ordination.[6] By this time the Braille system was well established in England but only a limited number of books was available in that form and a family story has it that, in choosing a wife, he was careful to light upon a young woman capable of reading the Greek Testament to him! Whatever the truth of this tale Margaret bore her clergyman husband six children, one of whom died as a baby. John believed his mother to be descended from Raphael Holinshed, the chronicler.[7] She was certainly related, as he tells us in a *Country Parson* foot-note, to the Burtons of Sutton Montis in Somerset who had held the living of that parish for over 200 years.[8]

Victorian middle-class notions of respectability and his father's modest stipend probably ensured that John's childhood was typified more by endurance than pleasure but in a Journal which he kept for a short time in 1932, recording his elder brother Dick's fiftieth birthday, he recalled that –

> Some of the best days of my life were spent in his company in that age most susceptible of lasting impressions, six to twelve and thereabouts. Wonderful days nutting, fishing, blackberrying, mushrooming in Carmarthenshire where we were living at the time: in remote fields named `Somewhere' to deceive our sisters who are not to be let into the secret, grow blackberries of

surprising size and succulence which have been preserved by us for our mother's birthday.[9]

Of John's sisters, Dorothy was two years older than he, Tertia, the third daughter – Violet having died in childhood – not much more than a year younger and Mary ten years his junior. Their mother, alas, did not enjoy good health – hence, perhaps, those succulent blackberries – and appears to have spent lengthy periods in nursing homes. At the time of the 1901 Census neither Margaret nor her eldest son were at home. The Easton Grey household then consisted of the 48-year-old rector, his mother Emily, aged 75 and 'living on her own means', Dorothy (15), John (12), Tertia (11) and Mary (3), together with Miss Rose Roberts (33), 'lady housekeeper', Elizabeth Nicholls (25), cook, and Clara Nicholls (22), the housemaid.[10]

John's father had a number of curacies in South Wales, Worcestershire and Wiltshire before being presented to the living of Easton Grey in Wiltshire in 1898. The small but attractive Cotswold stone village lies in the valley of the Bristol Avon some three miles west of Malmesbury. Readers of *The Diary of a Country Parson* might wonder why its editor, by then a Whitehall civil servant, was able to display such understanding of, and sympathy with, the rural way of life but although in adulthood he was by no means unappreciative of the capital's theatres, art galleries and museums, he was a country boy at heart. At Easton Grey he continued to enjoy the pastoral pleasures he had pursued in Carmarthenshire. In his 1932 Journal John records that his eldest son, Christopher, has asked if he might buy an air rifle. The father's first inclination is to refuse but then he recalls that –

> I began shooting rabbits at the age of fourteen, but it may have been fifteen. The air pistol brought back a vague memory of that intense excitement – waiting in a ditch on a summer evening with the gardener in a green Wiltshire field: an endless delay: at last a large rabbit comes out of the hedge about thirty yards away: I fire and – we were sitting on a tree trunk – am knocked backwards by the kick of the gun held too loosely against my shoulder. I scramble up rather dazed, to find the gardener walking towards me with a beam of congratulation – carrying the rabbit.[11]

The gardener was very probably the Arthur Cooper, 'gardener', who in 1901 had lived in neighbouring Wheelbarrow Lodge. The parson's family were, however, by no means confined to such relatively rude rural pursuits as rabbit shooting for they were also

made welcome at Easton Grey House the parkland of which stretched from the church and the main village road down to the river. This was the home of Lucy Graham-Smith, the sister-in-law of H. H. Asquith, chancellor of the exchequer, 1905-8, and prime minister, 1908-16. Asquith and his children by his first wife Helen Melland, who had died in 1891, and his second wife, Lucy Graham-Smith's sister, Margot Tennant, were frequent visitors to Easton Grey. Margot Asquith was a great huntswoman and particularly enjoyed the scope which her sister's house provided for hunting with the Duke of Beaufort's hounds, Easton being less than ten miles from Badminton. In her autobiography she would later write –

> The beauty of the place, the wild excitement of riding over fences and the perfect certainty I had that I would ride better than anyone in the whole world gave me an insolent confidence no earthquake can shock.[12]

Asquith himself was susceptible to a different kind of beauty. He had a well developed penchant – 'a slight weakness' he called it – for the companionship of clever and attractive young women. Most famously this led to the prolonged liaison with Venetia, the daughter of the 4th Baron Stanley of Alderley. By the time Venetia was 20 – in 1907 – she had been recruited into what Margot referred to, with a mixture of tolerance and irritation, as her husband's 'little harem'. The membership of this seraglio of souls – for Asquith's relationships with his lady friends appears to have been entirely platonic – was graphically described by one of its members in the following year:

> In January of that . . . year (1908) Pamela [Jekyll] drew Asquith a diagram of his heart divided between several young women: Viola Tree, twenty-three year old actress daughter of Herbert Beerbohm Tree and his wife Maud (both old friends of the Asquiths); Dorothy Beresford, eldest daughter of the Rector of Easton Grey; Margot's niece, Lillian Tennant; Venetia Stanley and Pamela herself.[13]

How much John, by this time a student at Cambridge, knew of the Chancellor's admiration for his sister, we do not know. Certainly, it seems to have done her no harm although it must have been, to say the least, disconcerting for a young woman from a sheltered middle-class background. What we can be sure of is that Dorothy handled this potentially embarrassing situation with great

discretion and some years later Margot was to favourably compare her behaviour with that of the far less considerate Venetia. Writing (to Venetia's future husband!) in 1914 Margot declared:

> If Venetia had an ounce of truth and candour like Viola, Mouche [Duncombe], Dorothy (a girl you never heard of) – and two other women whose names I shan't tell you – have got and have always shown me, I should smile . . .[14]

It was not until he went up to Cambridge in 1907 that Jack Beresford entered the conventional education system. Until then he had been taught at home. His earliest education was probably received at the hands of his parents. The novelist John Mortimer, whose father was also blind, has spoken of how reading to his father introduced him to a wide range of literature while talking to him of what he could see sharpened his descriptive powers. John Beresford probably benefited similarly and may also have inherited his creative instinct from a father who contributed letters and verses to periodicals and was the author of a long poem entitled *Last Year's Leaves*. It will be remembered that the middle-aged Beresford dedicated his last book, *Storm and Peace*, to his parents who 'brought up their children in the love of literature'.

In his mid-teens, young Beresford took a correspondence course with Francis Ernest Hutchinson who, although initially critical, appears to have been as effective as his influence was profound.[15] Hutchinson was himself a clergyman and a scholar whose particular interest lay in the sacred poets of the seventeenth century, especially Herbert, Crashaw and Vaughan. He was later to become a fellow of All Souls' and Canon of Worcester but at this time was a schoolmaster and then chaplain of King's, Cambridge, further strengthening John's connections with that college.[16] Hutchinson not only tutored his charge well enough to ensure his place at what was then the most academic of Cambridge colleges, but also taught him a love of history and of seventeenth century England in particular which was hugely to enrich the young man's life. As we shall see, Beresford's earliest published books, other than a youthful volume of verse, had seventeenth century subjects. His devotion to the poetry of 'Holy Mr Herbert'[17] and his admiration for the versifying skills of Charles Cotton preceded his recognition of Woodforde's diary-writing genius.

In 1907 John himself went up to King's College, Cambridge, on a bursary to read History. Until 1861 the college had been the

exclusive preserve of Etonians but since that date energetic efforts had been made to attract non-Etonians, a policy of which Beresford's father must have been an early beneficiary. In the later decades of the nineteenth century funds were raised to endow scholarships so as to open up a university education to bright boys whose parents might not otherwise be able to afford the fees. King's differed from other colleges in another important respect. Although in the university generally it was possible to read either for an honours degree or for the less demanding pass degree, admission to King's was granted only to those reading for honours. The college, together with Trinity, constituted the intellectual powerhouse of Cambridge. The first decade of the new century at King's was the era of E. M. Forster, John Maynard Keynes, Rupert Brooke and of the future Chancellor of the Exchequer Hugh Dalton.[18] The brilliance of its scholars complemented the beauty of the college itself – the fine Great Court, the wide sweep of the lawn at the Backs and the Perpendicular perfection of the Chapel. The afterglow of this Edwardian golden age at King's was to intensify in the minds of many of those who survived the nightmare of mass slaughter which then still lay ahead, unsuspected and unimaginable.

Of Beresford's time at King's we know a considerable amount thanks to a cache of letters found among the vast collection – of some 50,000 – bequeathed to the college by Oscar Browning. Browning was, to put things mildly, a controversial figure. He was a Fellow of King's from 1876-1908, having, prior to that, been a schoolmaster at Eton which he had been obliged to leave under somewhat murky circumstances. Beresford thus encountered him at the very end of his teaching career. There can be little doubt that the young man from Wiltshire, like numerous King's' students before him, found OB – or `the OB', as Browning was invariably called – an inspirational teacher and beguiling personality. His massive, balding head was perched upon a short but overweight body and he was often to be seen about Cambridge riding a tricycle and mopping his huge brow with a red bandana.[19] In general, students appear to have admired – even adored – him, while his colleagues found him, at best, irritating, often loathsome. A younger King's Fellow, Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson, described him as 'Falstaffian, shameless, affectionate, egotistic, snobbish, democratic, witty, lazy, dull, worldly'.[20] His history was often slapdash and inaccurate; his tutorials spiced with reference to

personalities he claimed to have known – "Cavour, a charming man, I knew him well" etc – yet he revolutionised the role of the teacher, wrote voluminously and inspired generations of King's historians. OB was a mass of contradictions. On the one hand he bragged of his friendship with various of the crowned heads of Europe and, on the other, his politics were decidedly progressive. In a 1941 review of John Steegman's deeply reactionary *Cambridge*,[21] E. M. Forster quoted the long-dead Browning by way of contrast and with approval:

> I have been drawn to think rather of the tens who have failed than of the units who have succeeded, and of the ore that lies buried in our social strata rather than of the bright coins that circulate from hand to hand. If a field of coal or of some other material lies unworked and unused, yet it is always there. It may be kept for some future age when its wealth will be more needed, and posterity will bless the prescience and parsimony of their ancestors who refrained from using it. But the human mind is born and lives and perishes. If it is unenlightened, it passes away into its native darkness.

'This', wrote Forster, 'is generosity, this is the warmth without which all education is senseless.'[22] It is a warmth which certainly appealed to the young John Beresford.

OB was the senior member most closely connected with numerous student societies, among them the Political Society, which he had established on returning to King's in 1876. It was set up as a discussion group for undergraduate historians and met in OB's rooms – on the top floor of Staircase A in Fellow's Building – on Monday evenings. Its proceedings are described by Browning's biographer Ian Anstruther –

> It was limited, at first, to a membership of twelve who, in the manner of the Trinity 'Apostles' whose customs in fact they largely followed, drew counters from a velvet bag (still a prized relic at King's) to decide the order in which they would speak. The proceedings began at nine o'clock with cups of tea and ginger biscuits; at nine-thirty a paper was read, the essayist holding forth from the hearth rug, a discussion followed, and then a vote; at ten-thirty the evening ended.[23]

Early in his Cambridge career Jack Beresford was invited to join the Political Society and we catch glimpses of the young man's growing confidence and enjoyment of university life through his correspondence with OB on matters relating to the Society. His

letter of acceptance, dated 13 November 1907, written in his hurried, flowing, slightly spiky hand, survives in the Browning Collection. In another letter, dated 18 March 1912, after he had come down from Cambridge and written on the note paper of the Board of Education for which Jack then worked, he recalled the Society's meetings:

> I often think of the days I spent hearing you lecture or talk at Cambridge – particularly the Monday night meetings of the Political Society. Your rooms I always found delightful, and there was a general atmosphere in them which made one feel that History was the only subject in the world really worth studying.[24]

Shortly after accepting the invitation to join the Political Society he had again written to OB; a letter full of youthful enthusiasm, asking if he might write a paper on 'Mr Gladstone: his life, character and works'; during the following Christmas vacation he spent much of his time 'pondering on Gladstone' and the paper itself must have been delivered sometime during his second term at King's.

We hear no more of the Political Society for another two years by which time Browning had, reluctantly, retired and Jack, now in his final year, wrote reminiscing:

> Jim Compton Burnett and I often speak of the old days: of your stately rooms, of the meetings of the old Political Society in them, and above all of that white hearth rug upon which we used to tremble as Freshmen when called upon to speak: to speak! How well I remember my first stammering oration about 'Belgium' – that being the subject of the paper: particularly my feeble attack upon 'Socialism' – Coit's paper – when I bore testimony that many a man was happier upon 15/- a week than the millionaire with £15,000; of course nothing to do with the question but I sat down highly pleased with myself – until Toulmin got up, and with eyes blazing with revolutionary fire, declared he "would like to see Mr Beresford living in a hovel with fifteen children on 15/- a week – how would he – Mr Beresford – like that?": he sat down to thunderous applause. Do you remember my paper on Mr Gladstone? Many a sleepless night I spent meditating upon the life of that great statesman: I remember Macaulay [college bursar] came to hear it, and in his high and charming voice confessed to having his faith shaken in Mr Gladstone after his Home Rule dealings.[25]

Coit was Richard Coit who had introduced Fabianism to

Cambridge. 'History,' Jack was later to write, 'is not a Fabian tract'.[26]

Jack found the atmosphere at King's highly congenial – 'one long delicious dream' – and he there made a number of friendships that were to endure long beyond his university days. His greatest friend was probably Noel (known to Beresford as 'Jim') Compton Burnett, brother of the novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett. A most sympathetic portrait is painted of Jim and his friends, including Jack, by Hilary Spurling in her biography *Ivy when young: the early years of Ivy Compton-Burnett*.[27] Of Ivy's brother she writes:

> King's was a magic world for him. He made friends easily. . . . The chief among them was Jack Beresford, to whom King's had also come as 'an almost magical release' from the strain of an intense, self-contained and almost melancholy life in an isolated country rectory.

Quite how accurate this portrayal of life at Easton Grey Rectory is it is difficult to assess. As we have seen, Jack certainly had some happy memories of his childhood and it is hard to imagine that life in a house which was home to the three young and attractive Beresford daughters, all of whom were welcome visitors when the brilliant Asquiths were staying at the great house, would be for long shrouded in melancholy. On the other hand their father does seem to have been, on occasion at least, difficult and his disability must have limited the range of experiences he could share with his children. The daughters spent many hours reading to him while Dick, Jack's elder brother, had been treated as the black sheep of the family for disappointing his father's unrealistic hopes and had, in effect, been banished to South Africa. 'Self-contained' the household certainly seems to have been. It must, however, be significant that when, in the years immediately preceding the Great War, both Noel and Ivy were frequent visitors to the Rectory, Miss Fox, the housekeeper, found them 'uncomfortably solemn'.

Noel Compton Burnett came from what had become a more than usually suppressed Victorian family. His father, an eminent homeopathic doctor, had died in 1901, leaving his wife with a substantial estate, a large house at Hove and the charge of thirteen children. Despite her wealth Mrs Compton Burnett (Ivy inserted a hyphen) insisted on strict domestic economies, for many years compelled her children to wear mourning and was subject to terrifying outbursts of rage. Ivy and her brothers Guy and Noel

Lord Fitzmaurice – "He does not underestimate his own ability" – Spy cartoon, Vanity Fair, 14/6/1906.

were especially close and the death of Guy, thought the brightest of the trio, shortly after going up to Cambridge in 1905, was a bitter blow to the family. Home must have had many unhappy memories for Noel when he went up to King's two years later. Although the Beresford household can scarcely have been as grim as that from which Noel had come, it is easy to see that the two young historians, neither of whom had been at a conventional school, would have had much in common.

They became – and remained – the best of friends, both having a high opinion of the other's character and ability which they expressed to Browning. Writing to OB in the summer of 1909, Compton Burnett wrote of Jack – 'He is in a state of lyric enthusiasm over the flowers of the field. He is a charming fellow and the incarnation of the ingenuous; I like him much'. Jim spent part of 1910 in Germany and on 5 November Beresford wrote to Browning:

> Noel Compton Burnett is not yet up, he is one of my greatest friends and we often talk over the old days when we knew you in Cambridge: I think he is the most brilliant undergraduate – or graduate – in King's.[28]

In fact, while both friends took a first class in Parts I and II of the History Tripos (in 1909 and 1910) it was to be Compton Burnett who was elected to a King's fellowship. Jack seems to have been less certain as to a future career. In November of his final year he wrote to Browning to say that he 'should like to stay in Cambridge for three or four more years, but most of the minor colleges have filled up their vacant fellowships.'[29]

While Jack's future was by no means decided by the time he left Cambridge, one aspect of it certainly was; writing was very important to him. At the end of the summer vacation of 1909 he had written to Browning 'because I know you are always ready to give a young fellow a helping hand if you can' – declaring that he would 'like to make some money by writing occasional articles – historical or otherwise – for any paper or Review that may take pity on me.' 'Can you tell me,' he asks, 'of any Editor who would look with favour upon an undergraduate's efforts . . .?' Browning must have replied promptly and at length as four days later Jack again addresses his old tutor:

> September 28th 1909
> My dear Mr Browning,
>
> It was very kind of you to write me so long a letter. I quite

> appreciate what you say about Editors and my only hope is that through sheer importunity I may prevail over them. . . . I send you an essay which I sent to the 'Times' . . .[30]

This was apparently on an historical topic as within another four days he was again writing to Browning:

> My dear Mr Browning,
> Thank you very much for your good criticism and advice. As soon as I can, I will write something in a fairly journalistic style about Trains or Gardens or something nothing to do with History . . .[31]

No more is heard of this scheme but a little over a year later we learn of what may well have been the first of Beresford's works to find its way into print: an essay on Horace Walpole published in the *Cambridge Review*. Readers of *The Diary of a Country Parson* will remember that the editor often quotes from Walpole's *Letters* and, in a memorable phrase, claims that in literature Woodforde 'may be said to represent the best audit ale, as Horace Walpole represents the best champagne of the eighteenth century'.[32]

The image of the writer was certainly one which appealed to the young Beresford and one which he sought to cultivate even after he came down from the university. By the spring of 1911 Jack was living in Chippenham and working as a voluntary assistant to the Wiltshire Education Authority while he awaited an opening at the Board of Education office in Whitehall.

From Chippenham Jack wrote to Browning:

> I go daily to Trowbridge by train: I try to bring cultivation into that most prosaic means of locomotion by reading Dickinson's *The Greek View of Life*. I also wear a Byron collar and a blue tie of great size: the guard and all the porters are now convinced that I am a poet.[33]

The first volume of *The Diary of a Country Parson* is dedicated –

To
Lord Fitzmaurice
of Leigh
In Memory of many Good
Talks of History, Books
and Men
in a Wiltshire Garden

Lord Fitzmaurice (1846-1935) lived within ten miles of Chippenham at Leigh House, near Bradford-on-Avon and it seems

likely that it was at this stage in his life that Jack and he, perhaps through the good offices of the Asquiths, first became acquainted. Baptised Edmund George Petty-Fitzmaurice, he was better known as Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice, having been a Liberal MP and, between 1908-9, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. He was also a distinguished historian who had written biographies of William, Lord Shelburne and Lord Granville. Jack was by no means alone in seeking out his wisdom. His brilliant conversation was spiced with what the *Twentieth Century Dictionary of National Biography* describes as 'the Scottish humour and French wit of his maternal ancestors' and he attracted many scholars, American as well as British to Leigh House, 'He also had the rare gift' – the *DNB* again – 'of being as much interested in the younger generation as in his own.' A rather less flattering opinion was voiced in *Vanity Fair* in which a Spy cartoon of Lord Edmund bears the legend, "He doesn't underestimate his own ability", but he clearly had many virtues which appealed to the young Jack Beresford. Fitzmaurice's *Shelburne* was to be a major source for the background notes to the first volume of *The Diary of a Country Parson.*

In the universities, as in the world of letters, the Decadence of the 'Nineties had, despite the Wilde case, spilled over into the Edwardian era. Among the poetry-loving, anti-philistine set to which Jack had attached himself at King's there were undoubted homosexual overtones but, while he acquired there a degree of flamboyance and a number of male friends to whom he was to display a lifelong loyalty, he never seems to have doubted his heterosexuality. This was not the case with the author of Jack's railway reading, *The Greek View of Life.* Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson had taken a First class in Classics in 1884 and had been elected to a fellowship of King's three years later. Described in the *DNB* as 'a humanist, historian and philosophical writer', The *Greek View of Life* was his best known, still highly regarded, book but he also wrote on *The Development of Parliament during the Nineteenth Century* and *Justice and Liberty.* In 1916, following a visit to Garsington, Lady Ottoline Morrell wrote of 'Goldie' that, before the War he had at Cambridge –

> . . . a land of his own, where . . . he had lived not too unhappily, enjoying the beauty of King's and the College Gardens, the libraries and nightingales and lovely youth – writing Socratic dialogues in beautiful English – teaching young men nearly all of whom he thought good and enchanting.[34]

After the War, Lowes Dickinson worked hard to ensure that the dreadful blood-letting of the Somme and Passchendaele were not repeated, drafting schemes for international co-operation he is thought to have been the first to use the term 'league of nations'. In 1932, Jack by this time a highly respectable and, no doubt, pin-striped, civil servant, met 'Goldie' on the platform at Notting Hill Gate –

> . . . and was carried back in memory to golden days at King's before the war: he is one of the Cambridge dons whose voice has been heard far beyond the walls of the university in a series of admirable works, such as *The Greek View of Life*. Somehow we got on to Wordsworth just before the train came in and agreed that tranquillity was the thing chiefly to be desired in life and that, when the external world was especially disturbed, it was always possible to take refuge in *The Prelude*.[35]

Lowes Dickinson died, following an operation, later that year and thus did not live to see the withdrawal of Germany and Japan from the League of Nations the following year: the beginning of the end of that noble, if flawed, ambition.

But we must return to the years immediately preceding the Great War. By March 1912 Jack had gained his Whitehall appointment, thanks, apparently, to Asquith's colleague, the President of the Board of Education, Walter Runciman. He wrote to Oscar Browning, now living in Rome, to announce that he was 'a Junior Examiner in what I believe you regard as an inefficient institution'. 'I am,' he continued, 'in the Universities Department of this Board and find the work interesting on the whole, though one feels rather tied and bound by the chains which have been cast for one by the heads of the Office.' That, however, he concluded with unconvincing resignation, 'is inevitable in a government office which administers a whole Kingdom.'[36]

Jack was at this time lodging at the home of Arthur Hill who was Assistant Director at the Royal Botanical Gardens, a post he had taken up on giving up a King's fellowship in 1907. Later, as Sir Arthur Hill, FRS, he was for many years to be Director at Kew. He was to outlive Jack to whom he became a firm friend and the godfather of one of his sons. He was by no means the only scientist to enjoy Beresford's company and Jack doubtless enjoyed his tales of botanising in places as far-flung as Iceland, Java and the Bolivian Andes.[37] Kew was always to be a source of solace and delight to the sometimes harassed civil servant.

While now living in London, Jack often returned to Easton Grey at the week-ends often taking Noel Compton Burnett, and sometimes his sister Ivy, with him. Unsurprisingly, Noel fell in love with one of the three beautiful Beresford girls, the middle one, nearest to himself in age, Tertia. Hilary Spurling describes her as 'the most retiring, with more than her share of the melancholy and pessimism which ran through the whole family and a romantic disposition not belied by her white skin, green eyes and blue-black raven's hair'.[38]

Lucy Graham-Smith of Easton Grey House was by this time widowed and in her fifties. In addition to her role as 'fairy godmother' to the Beresford family, she enjoyed bridge, painting and entertaining her sister Margot with the Prime Minister and their family. It was at about this time, perhaps during one of Jack's week-ends down from London, that he sat to her for his portrait. Executed in chalks with great technical assurance and much flair it shows Jack, at the age of twenty-five or -six, his hair already receding to the advantage of a noble brow, tie-less but sporting the Byron collar, his dark eyes full of the animation which so charmed all who knew him.

It was at about this time that he met, charmed and was charmed by, at a London dance, Janet Spicer, the woman who was to give structure to his life and, one might say, purpose. Janet Dykes Spicer was the daughter of the papermaker and Liberal MP, Sir Albert Spicer, Bt (1847-1934), a distinguished parliamentarian who had just been entrusted with the chairmanship of the select Committee enquiring into the Marconi Affair. He was also one of two Liberal MPs who in 1914 supported the nascent African National Congress by expressing concern over the Native Lands Act. Janet was one of the eleven children of Albert and Jessie Spicer.[39]

In his 1932 Journal, Jack recalled meeting Janet in 1914 and the whirlwind romance, in the midst of the gathering European storm, which followed. Emerging from the Regent's Park Botanical Garden they –

> . . . passed by Bedford College and gazed up at the wing where Janet worked when she was preparing herself to be a doctor. Then we met at a dance and a fortnight later were engaged.[40]

Coming from a conventional background Janet was intrigued by a man who, on an early date, presented her not with the expected box of chocolates but with a volume of Wordsworth. She also

remembered, with some alarm, being taken to literary parties to meet such not entirely respectable figures as H. G. Wells.[41]

By the time Jack and Janet were engaged, war, the inevitability of which had long been taken for granted, had broken out. Jack and Noel Compton Burnett had spent the summer of 1914 at an OTC camp in Cambridge. Neither were natural soldiers, least of all Noel, who was the first to be given a commission. While nobody can read Beresford's books without being convinced of a passionate patriotism this fell far short of the jingoism sweeping the country. Before going to France both men married: firstly, Noel to Tertia and then, on 11 February 1915, Jack married Janet. Although Janet came from a well-to-do family, she was one of eight daughters and did not bring great financial resources with her. Far more importantly, however, she did bring a sensitivity, which she shared with her husband, combined with a practicality which he almost entirely lacked. He later recalled –

> Years ago before the war I used to urge the case of marriage on £400 a year. Once I was discussing this when a charming and witty woman who having listened quietly, merely observed '*very* small fires, dear Jack!' You could almost see the single coal wanly fading in an exiguous grate, as she said it. Well J. & I married on not very much more and for one reason and another we had not more than £525 or so to spend on ourselves and we lived very comfortably in a maisonette over a dairy in Queen's Road.[42]

In the year in which he was married Jack achieved a further triumph, the publication of his first book. *Poems by Two Brothers* is made up of verses by both Jack and his brother Richard. A copy was sent to Noel in France who wrote back to say how much he had enjoyed them: '. . . yours very familiar to me and bringing back very many walks and talks. I like them very much and your brother's have a fresh beauty for me.'[43]

Poetry would certainly have been very much more to Noel's taste than warfare. At the end of the year he wrote to Jack a letter full of stoical disillusion:

> You remember our high Cambridge [OTC camp] talk, so up in the clouds and so insincere according to the way of youth and it's odd to consider how all of it is now brought to the rather sordid touch of practice.[44]

1916 must have been the grimmest year of Jack Beresford's life as it was of many another. The year began, unpropitiously enough,

with a fall-out with the Asquiths – or, at least, with Margot. The Prime Minister's fourth son, Cyril (or Cys), disappointed at having been jilted by Margot's niece, Catherine Tennant, had spent most of the New Year at Easton Grey Rectory and, shortly afterwards, announced that he was engaged to be married to the youngest of the Beresford sisters, Mary, who was 18. Margot had a desperately, quite unfairly, low opinion of Mary and wrote in her journal that Cys's letter 'shattered me with grief'. She put great pressure on her step-son to break off the engagement, refusing to allow Mary to visit him in Downing Street. The outcome was that Cys did eventually agree to end the relationship, acquiescing in Margot's suggestion that Mary's father had 'emotionally blackmailed' him by accusing him of 'compromising' his daughter. Colin Clifford describes the painful final scene of the affair:

> Violet and Maurice Bonham Carter . . . accompanied him [Cys] to Easton Grey where he explained his decision to Mary while his sister [Violet], like some avenging angel, bearded the errant rector.[45]

Mary, who really was in love with Cys, nevertheless accepted the situation and Violet 'cried without ceasing most of the day at Mary's wonderful goodness and self-less behaviour.' Her husband, Maurice, had no doubts that Margot was 'the villain of the piece' and told her as much.

Far worse was in store for both the Asquiths and the Beresfords. On 11 June, Jack's father died at Easton Grey at the age of 63. Noel Compton Burnett was 29. In a Cambridge Union debate eight years earlier he had declared that in the event of having to serve his country he would be 'the last to advance and the first to retire'.[46] In the event Noel and his company of the 7th Leicesters were among the twenty thousand who took part in the first night attack on the Somme, on 14 July. Had the cavalry been able to take advantage of the infantry's initial success, the long awaited, dearly-bought break-through may have taken place. Instead the opportunity was lost and, by the end of Bastille Day 1916, many more thousands lay dead, among them, at Mametz Wood, killed in the initial attack, 'Jim' Compton Burnett. He was one of 174 Kingsmen who lost their lives in 'the war that will end war'.[47]

By the summer of 1916 Jack was also in France and Tertia was living next door to Janet Beresford in Queen's Road. On hearing of Noel's death, she ran to Janet begging her to go to Downing

Street for, surely, there had been some mistake? Janet did as her sister-in-law asked and was admitted to Margot but found her 'kind but not reassuring'. By the time she got back home Tertia had taken an overdose of sleeping tablets. She recovered but her state of mind remained a worry to her friends. Even the Prime Minister was concerned. He wrote to Hilda Harrisson:

> It is too sad to think that Tertia's husband is killed but I am afraid it is so. I tremble to think what will happen to her. And his loss is a terrible waste. He was not *chair à canon.*[48]

But, of course, he was; as was Asquith's own brilliant son, Raymond, killed in action two months later.

Jack himself was not in the front line but he was near enough to it to know something of the agonies. A lieutenant in the Royal Army Service Corps, he was a supply officer with the 41st Divisional Supply Column seeing service in France and, later, Italy. He emerged from the War appalled not only by the loss of some of his dearest friends but by the inhumanity of modern warfare:

> There is no nobility in machine guns and bombs: the very appearance of modern weapons is hideous: a tank is like a caricature of a monster of the ancestral slime.[49]

One day in January 1932 on his way home from work he was caught in 'the most torrential rain, accompanied by a gale that I have ever known in London . . . Driven by the wind and splashing back from the hard pavement and glassy road in great gusts of melancholy anguish'. He was reminded of 1916:

> . . . and those relentless rains which came down in France and Flanders, as though the skies were endlessly weeping for the unspeakable suffering poor souls. Never shall I forget during the battle of the Somme seeing some infantrymen who had just marched back after being relieved, lying in the street of a little village behind the lines, so dog-tired that they just rested there, some of them actually asleep, while the rain poured upon them and ran in streams under their exhausted bodies.[50]

The terrible year 1916 had, however, one great consolation for Janet and Jack. On 3 April Janet was safely delivered of Rosemary, the first of the couple's four children (Ruth would be born in the following year, Christopher in 1919 and Benedict in 1924).

By the end of the War it is probably true to say that John Beresford had already encountered those influences which were most

importantly to determine how the remainder of his life would be spent. It is true that he had not yet met Dr R. E. H. Woodforde and that gentleman's wonderful treasure trove: the manuscript diaries of James Woodforde. But the mental apparatus was in place which would respond, with such manifest delight, to the diary notebooks – 'with their marbled board sides and decorous leather backs' – recognise their significance and bring them to the notice of an appreciative public. To say that his tastes were Edwardian would do scant justice to one whose love of poetry embraced Herbert, Gray and, especially, Wordsworth. The Modern Movement, however, left him cold. He read Proust but T. S. Eliot, born in the same year as himself, he could not – or would not – understand.[51] His greatest intellectual joys came from looking back upon a relatively golden age before the nightmare of the recent past.

His ability to do this was greatly enhanced by his practical helpmeet, Janet. By 1918 she was the mother of two little girls and, with bombing raids of the capital becoming an increasing danger, she decided to seek out a rural retreat and, with the help of an old school friend, found Ashwell End, near Baldock in Hertfordshire. It is an address familiar to all readers of *A Country Parson*. Ashwell End was a small seventeenth century farmhouse that had been carefully restored by Mrs Phyllis Fordham who lived nearby at The Bury. Janet would later recall realising that her first visit had the object not of seeing whether the house was suitable for her but whether she was suitable for the house! Fortunately, she met with Mrs Fordham's approval and Ashwell End, in due course, met with Jack's. The Beresfords continued to be tenants until the year before Janet died in 1974.

The family, however, spent most of their time in another rented house, 86 Lansdowne Road, Holland Park. At the Holland Park end of the road the houses are very grand, detached and semi-detached Victorian villas – in one of which, in the late 'twenties, lived the family of the novelist-to-be Elizabeth Jane Howard.[52] Number 86, however, is a terraced house at the eminently pleasant but more modest Ladbroke Hill end of the road. Shamefully, there is only one blue plaque in this part of Lansdowne Road and it celebrates the residence not of the editor of *The Diary of a Country Parson* but of a nineteenth century chess champion!

Although Jack did much of his research in the British Museum and London Libraries, a lot of his writing was done in the more relaxing atmosphere of Ashwell End. The joy and solace which that house

provided is graphically described in this extract from the 1932 Journal:

> 20th May
> In the evening Janet and I met at King's Cross for spending Saturday and Sunday at Ashwell. As we arrived at the garden gate and looked over the low wall we could hardly suppress a cry of delight at the rainbow beauty of the garden in front of the house. It has never looked so well. The forget-me-nots are so abundant that the sky seems to have fallen in splashes, and the pansies of every colour and kind, with tulips and wall-flowers and tall yellow daisies make a pattern of compacted glory. Behind the house the apple-trees are in full and crowded sail of blossom and this small Jacobean house – once a little farm – smiles in between with its red tiled roof and cream pargetted walls. Entire tranquillity descends as one goes in at the front gate and enters the front door which opens directly into the long low room – the sitting room with all the books, the grandfather clock, the great oak beams and the brick floor of faded rose pink.[53]

With the end of the War Jack had returned to Whitehall, firstly as Private Secretary to the Food Controller, George Roberts, and then as a Principal in the Treasury. Although he was later to achieve huge job satisfaction as Secretary to the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries, from 1927-30, and, particularly, as Secretary to the University Grants Committee,[54] it is probably true to say that much of his work at the Treasury he found disagreeable, especially when it involved denying money to worthy projects. Although he undoubtedly made a first-rate committee secretary – he was made CBE in 1938 – he had little sympathy for the more mundane aspects of bureaucracy and told an amusing tale of a conversation with Dr Woodforde:

> I went up to see Dr W.; laughed much over his description of an Old Age Pensioner's form which was recently brought to him to testify, filled up wholly wrong in every particular, the good old rustic declaring that he was a 'female' and giving his wife's birthday as the right answer for his own, and so on. What an admirable revenge – though innocent and unconscious – on all forms whatsoever![55]

It was, perhaps, because he found a lot of his routine work dull that in the 'twenties he directed so much of his energy into the building of a substantial literary reputation.

To understand quite how productive John Beresford was in the

years after the Great War it is useful to remind ourselves of the books he either wrote or edited:

1923	*Poems of Charles Cotton* (Ed.)
	Gossip of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries
1924	*The Diary of a Country Parson, 1758-81* (Ed.)
1925	*Letters of Thomas Gray* (Ed.)
	The Godfather of Downing Street: Sir George Downing, 1623-89
1926	*The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. II* (Ed.)
1927	*The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. III* (Ed.)
	Memoirs of an Eighteenth Century Footman: John Macdonald's Travels (Ed.)
1929	*The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. IV* (Ed.)
1931	*The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. V* (Ed.)
1932	*Mr Du Quesne and Other Essays*
1936	*Storm and Peace*

In addition it should be remembered that there were numerous essays written for a variety of newspapers and reviews including the *Times*, *Spectator*, *London Mercury*, *Edinburgh Review*, *London Quarterly Review* and *The Nation and Athenaeum*. That the 'thirties were less productive than the 'twenties can, in part, be attributed to the fact that from 1933 he was Secretary of the Universities Grant Committee, a job which not only kept him busy but which he also greatly enjoyed.

Given the amount of work he was doing, it is hardly surprising that in the midst of editing *The Diary of a Country Parson* Jack suffered a nervous breakdown. A perusal of some correspondence with Catharine Bodham Johnson[56] provides an insight into an aspect of both the editorial process and the pressure that he was under. He had written requesting permission to reproduce pictures of the Bodhams which had appeared in Mrs Bodham Johnson's *William Bodham Donne and his Friends*. On 1 August 1927 he was at Ashwell End and wrote as follows:

> Dear Mrs Johnson,
>
> Very many thanks for your kind letter. I should be most grateful for photographs of the portraits of Mr & Mrs Bodham. I remember seeing the portrait of Mrs Bodham as a very old lady in your book which I found so useful for the footnote to p. 234, Vol. II of the Diary.
>
> I understand from Dr Woodforde that Nancy went to stay with the Bodhams for a considerable time after the death of the

Diarist, and have seen two very pleasant letters of Mrs B's to Nancy's own fascinating (to me) correspondence. Dr Woodforde asked me to ask you if any of your letters or documents throw light on Parson Woodforde himself – refer to him or give any indication of exactly how his neighbours regarded him.

I have had a breakdown in health through pressure of work, but am better: I must not, however, write further at the moment.

Yours very truly,

John Beresford

If I am in Norwich at any time I should like to look you up.

Mrs Johnson's response is of great interest and is also worth quoting in full:

32, The Close
Norwich

August 3rd '27

Dear Mr Beresford,

I will certainly get the photographs you wish for as soon as possible – my brother will let you have Mr Bodham & I am sure Methuen [her publisher] would let you have the one of Mrs Bodham in my book. I will write to them. The one of Dr William Donne (of Norwich) in my book was taken from a water colour in the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital – but I have written to my cousin Charles Manning who has the original miniatures of Dr Donne & his wife.

I am most interested to hear that Nancy Woodforde stayed with the Bodhams after her uncle's death. I have a good number of letters lately come to me of Mrs Bodhams but as far as I have read them at present, they are before your dates – mostly written to her mother & her beloved brother Castres but now that I feel that Nancy Woodforde is a personal friend of mine, I shall not overlook her name if it occurs (among the letters is the original one of Cowper to Mrs Bodham on the receipt of his Mother's picture) but I will carefully look through all the letters again and see if there is any reference to Weston or the Woodfordes.

I was at Mattishall last week & it was looking very charming and quite unspoilt – the garden has an old world fragrance which is very delightful.

It would give me much pleasure if you are ever in Norwich if you would look me up. If you are interested in 'Cowper' I possess the 3rd part of his Library – his father's family Bible, & various 'relics' in his travelling trunk which the beloved "Johnny" treasured.

I have few brains myself but in my early youth I sat at the feet (or on the knee) of great men and women and heard them

talk to my grandfather – Edward Fitzgerald, Archbishop Trench, Samuel Lawrence, Annie Thackeray, Fanny Kemble etc. and I am proud to have shaken hands with Carlyle. Forgive the digression and believe me

Yours very truly,
Catharine B. Johnson

A number of further letters were exchanged before 6 November when Jack writes asking that the Bodham photographs be sent to Lansdowne Road 'with the names & dates of birth & death on the back, & any other brief particulars ('Father of' etc. etc.) you think relevant'. Then on 22 November, from Lansdowne Road, we find the following letter to Catharine from Janet:

Dear Mrs Johnson,

My husband asks me to thank you very much indeed for the portraits which arrived safely. He is delighted with them. I am writing this for him as he comes in very late and tired.

Yours sincerely,
Janet Beresford

Janet was also of great help in correcting the proofs of the Diary. In the Introduction to both volumes IV and V Jack points out that 'but for her it would not be ready'.

Jack was clearly in a bad way but the recommended cure seems to have been effective. He was told that he needed to find some form of recreation and he took to regular riding, before going to the office and on Saturday mornings, in the Row. It was an expensive activity for one on his income of £900 pa, but it appears to have been money well spent, benefiting him both physically and psychologically. He would continue to feel from time to time 'dragged by a chain of harsh necessity' but the 1932 Journal provides abundant evidence of the therapeutic effect of riding:

9th January
Rode before breakfast this morning on my beloved Harmony – not that I own her but she is none the less mine in my inner consciousness. The Park divinely lovely in untouched white frost, with mist coming off the Serpentine and ducks and pigeons and sea-gulls in magical flight or repose. My half-hour gone in the twinkling of an eye as Harmony moved over the ground like the ripple of a wave.[57]

It would be wrong to suggest that Jack had hitherto spent his entire life either in the office or the library for his writing also involved

him in considerable fieldwork and we catch glimpses of him on his Norfolk excursions (he did not own a car) in such footnotes and introductory remarks as

> [of the King's Head, Norwich] Alas, it is no longer in existence, I searched the Market Place in Norwich for it in vain.[58]

and

> The Hart survives as an inn at Weston, looking precisely the same, I imagine, as it has looked for some centuries: it is a charming little old inn with the cosiest of kitchens.[59]

and, of the church at Weston

> . . . especially spacious and beautiful, [it] is of the perpendicular period and dedicated to All Saints . . . the descendants of Squire Custance are still the Squires of Weston and doubtless many descendants of the farmers and villagers who flourished in the Diarist's day survive – the names on the village war memorial are sorrowfully familiar.[60]

He also greatly enjoyed his visits to the Derbyshire/Staffordshire border – Dovedale and thereabouts – tracing the footsteps of his Beresford ancestors in order to write such essays as that on Judith Beresford and 'On Re-visiting Norbury'. It was of great importance to him that Charles Cotton was a forebear and when G. D. H. and Margaret Cole embellished the already 'ludicrous' account of his Beresford great-grandfather, the Rector of St Andrew's, Holborn – but resident of Aylestone, Leicestershire – in Cobbett's *Rural Rides* by suggesting that he belonged to the enormous Irish family known as 'the notorious Beresfords', Jack was quick to point out the errors of both the Coles and Cobbett in an article in the *Times Literary Supplement*.[61]

Jack was also helped by the width and variety of his friendships. Other of Jack's Cambridge friends included Geoffrey Keynes, Geoffrey Fry and Sydney Saxon Turner. Geoffrey Langdon Keynes was very much part of what Noel Annan has called 'the intellectual aristocracy'. In addition to his brother, John Maynard the economist, his father had been a philosopher and Fellow of Pembroke and his sister married a future professor of physiology. Geoffrey himself married in 1917 a grand-daughter of Charles Darwin. Graduating with a First in Natural Sciences in 1909, Keynes went on to distinguish himself in two totally different fields. In addition to becoming an eminent surgeon, he produced

important bibliographies of John Donne, William Blake, Sir Thomas Browne and Jane Austen among others, as well as producing editions of the writings of Blake, Browne and Izaak Walton. We get an idea of the two friends' shared interests from two entries in the 1932 *Journal*:

> 14 April
> Dined as Geoffrey K's guest with The Double Crown Club. Most agreeable talk of books and men and especially of the duty of keeping or destroying letters. G.K. and I emphatic for preservation if they were, or are, intrinsically interesting, independently of the writer's celebrity or lack of it. I am not sure we convinced the younger generation . . .[62]

There is quite some irony here for Geoffrey Keynes was an executor of the estate of his old school and university chum Rupert Brooke and throughout his long life he was always anxious to guard Brooke's posthumous reputation, suppressing much of what is now known to be the truth. Preservation and revelation were not, apparently, to be confused.[63]

The Double Crown Club had been founded in 1924 as a dining club for printers and typographers and Keynes's presence there is explained by this second entry in the 1932 Journal:

> 22 April
> In the evening came down to Ashwell. Read in the train an admirable review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of the final volumes of Geoffrey Keynes's edition of Sir Thomas Browne: 'another sustained service to literature'. One of the books which it gives me a thrill to handle is G.K.'s edition of Walton's works, perfectly bound and printed by the Nonesuch Press: not the less cherished for being given to me by him.[64]

The Nonesuch Press had been founded in 1922 by Francis Meynell, another friend of both Beresford and Keynes. It may well have been Meynell who put Jack in contact with his first publisher Richard Cobden-Sanderson of 17 Thavies Inn, off Holborn Circus. Cobden-Sanderson's father, Thomas, had studied bookbinding under Roger de Coverley, knew William Morris and Burne-Jones and was in his own right an important 'arts and craft movement' figure. Alas, there is no mention of Jack in Geoffrey's autobiography, *The Gates of Memory*, written when he was in his nineties. He died in 1982.

Geoffrey Fry was a member of the Quaker, chocolate-making family. He went up to Cambridge, from Harrow, in the same year

as Jack who, twenty-five years later, recalled, 'we first met in the pleasant courts of King's'. Geoffrey was a lawyer who worked at the Home Office before becoming private secretary to a fellow Harrovian, Stanley Baldwin. Geoffrey and his wife Alathea lived at Oare House near Marlborough where the Beresfords were welcome guests. As a young man Jack had been taken to the Somerset house of two of Fry's cousins which he described in these typically striking and sympathetic words:

> . . . built about 1600, you go down a long straight drive and there, in front, beams the mellow welcome of close on three and a half centuries of English peace wrought in the solemnity of stone.[65]

What a pity it is that Beresford never attempted to anticipate Pevsner!

Sydney Saxon Turner appears to have lacked the charm of the two Geoffreys. He, too, was at Cambridge with Jack and, like him, entered the civil service. He had been a member of the Apostles in whose company he had met Lytton Strachey who introduced him to the Woolfs and, in due course, it may well have been Sydney who introduced Virginia to Parson Woodforde. Gerald Brenan found him 'a curious, perverse creature and one of the greatest bores I have ever known'.[66] The youngest Beresford, the eight-year-old – in 1932 – Benedict – was clearly of another opinion. He spent no less than 9d on a small, red, ornamental bear which he sent to Sydney, having himself a green one which accompanied him everywhere. He was delighted to receive a thank-you letter by return of post and vowed to keep it, 'I have never had a letter from Mr. T. before, and am never likely to get another, so it's rare', he declared.[67]

Jack's charm and wit, both apparent even in the driest official papers, also attracted the friendship of an older generation. Lord Fitzmaurice and the Director of Kew, Sir Arthur Hill, we have already met. As Secretary to the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries (1927-30), he was on the friendliest terms with Lord D'Abernon, the Chairman, the geologist, Sir Henry Miers and the archaeologist and numismatist, Sir George Macdonald. Miers and Macdonald became particular friends and we catch sight of both of them in the pages of the Journal. Miers was a mineralogist – after whom the mineral miersite was named – Fellow of the Royal Society and Trustee of the British Museum. Jack and Janet dined with him on 2 June, 1932:

> Much to be said for the airiness of West Hampstead [Aberdare Gardens] and more for the mulberry tree which grows in H.M.'s garden and makes one think of tranquil things. A very enjoyable dinner in point of both food and talk. And my eye always wanders to the pleasing portrait of H.M.'s great-grandfather, the indefatigable and effective Francis Place.[68]

Macdonald was a Scotsman who, at 70, was four years younger than Miers. We meet him in the pages of the Journal giving British Museum post-cards to the Beresford children and on this occasion in Whitehall:

> G.M. looked in to see me at the office. He is President of the Classical Association this year, and had just delivered his address – on Agricola – at Reading. We had a pleasant talk about an eighteenth century antiquary whose manners and morals, even in matters of scholarship, were not all that they should have been: G.M. sharpening his claymore for an assault. How he would have warmed the heart of Sir Walter Scott, though for that matter Scott would have appreciated the immoral antiquary also![69]

Jack and Janet also remained on good terms with Ivy Compton-Burnett – although Janet never really liked her companion Margaret Jourdain but she always made a particular effort when Ivy went down to Ashwell End. Members of the Beresford family, variously transmogrified, made their way into Ivy's novels, so that, for example, Ruth Giffard in *More Women than Men* is thought to be modelled on Tertia. Tertia herself re-married in 1920 – to another friend of Jack's friends, Horace Mann from the Board of Education, thirteen years her senior. Dorothy, the eldest of what Hilary Spurling describes as the 'beautiful, dreamy, unworldly and intensively competitive' sisters,[70] had married another civil servant friend of Jack's, Alan Kidd, in 1917. They had one child, Roger, before Alan died of septicaemia, following a fishing holiday in Scotland in 1933. Alan had been Secretary to the University Grants Committee which, in a minute dated 25 June 1934, recorded their 'sense of incalculable loss' suffered by his death. It was a formula to be employed seven years later with the death of his brother-in-law Jack, who succeeded him in the post.

Despite the financial restraints of the depression years, this was a period of steady university expansion and it involved Jack in visiting universities, meeting and working with precisely the kind of people that he liked; Arthur Hill and Ernest de Selincourt among

them. His daughter, Rosemary, relates that, on arriving home, he would talk animatedly of his day at the office in a way in which he never did at the Treasury.

Shortly before Alan Kidd's untimely death, Jack dined with another civil service friend, Geoffrey Whiskard – later to be High Commissioner in Australia – and both agreed 'we certainly ought to live in the country and both agreed also that it was perfectly impossible.'[71] Despite the satisfaction that the UGC job provided, Ashwell End was to remain the place for reading, relaxation and the rural life, those intimations of tranquillity which Jack so much enjoyed. Most holidays were spent there such as that of Easter, 1934 which he used to write the 'General Introduction' to C. Bruyn Andrews's first volume of *The Torrington Diaries*. It is full of many of his favourite points of reference – Cowper's *The Task* and Wordsworth's Prelude; Woodforde, of course, and, a staple of Jack's, the Irish historian W. E. H. Lecky. The editor of Woodforde, who described Bishop Yonge of Norwich as 'bearing an uncanny resemblance to Queen Victoria'[72] and admired the sermon-writer who apostrophised the Devil as 'Tremendous, Sir!'[73] was ever on the look-out for amusing comparisons or stories and was not disappointed in Byng [Lord Torrington] who

> with witty humility adds that he would have desired his wife . . . to have assisted him in his Journals, 'but for the recollection of a story of a sea captain, who observing (on shipboard) two boys aloft, call'd out – "Jack, what are you doing there?" "I am doing nothing at all", says Jack. "And what are you doing there, Will?" "I am only helping Jack, Sir!" '[74]

John Byng's *Diaries* must have been near-perfect reading for Jack at Ashwell for

> Byng's head is so entirely in England, in the English countryside, in the development or slumber of town and village, that he has neither time nor inclination to think of anything else. To wish London out of his mind . . . this was his one wish, once he set out on his Tours.[75]

Jack himself was in London on the night of 17 October 1940 when the building in which he was fire-watching in Whitehall received a direct hit. John Beresford and two of his colleagues were killed. An obituary in *The Times* five days later described him as 'A man of strong scholarly and artistic tastes' who 'managed to combine much literary work with his duties as a Civil Servant and could

sometimes be seen working in the reading room of the British Museum during his lunch interval.' After listing his principal publications, the obituarist continued:

> Beresford's kindness and notable charm of manner endeared him to all those who were brought into contact with him and, in literary and scholarly circles, particularly those concerned with the great national museums and galleries, he will be greatly regretted.[76]

At a meeting of the UGC on 15 June 1941, the Chairman, Sir Walter Moberly, proposed the following motion which was passed:

> At the first meeting since the death of their Secretary, Mr John Beresford, whilst on active duty as a Home Guard, the Members of the University Grants Committee desire to place on record their sorrow and their sense of the severity of the loss both to the Committee and to the Universities. During the last seven years their work has owed much to Mr Beresford's wholehearted devotion and to his intimate understanding and appreciation of the higher University ideals; in particular, they recall with gratitude his ardent interest in University Libraries and in all that concerns the welfare of students. In wartime the Universities have been especially indebted to the initiative and resource with which in all emergencies he has championed their integrity as, to use his own words, 'citadels of civilisation'. At the same time, by his personal charm, his gaiety and wit, and his quick and sensitive sympathy, he has won the warm affection of all his colleagues. They desire to offer to Mrs Beresford and her family their very sincere and deep sorrow in her loss.[77]

This is a tribute which surely goes a long way beyond the polite official minute.

Ivy Compton-Burnett wrote to Jack's sister Dorothy in what Hilary Spurling refers to as 'the same guarded tone she had used to contain her desperation after Noel's death in 1916':

> October 22, 1940
> Dearest Dorothy,
> There is so much courage about us today, and so much feeling that any demand upon it must simply be met, that the normal thoughts and feelings seem out of place. And yet I can't help seeing it all as tragedy. It is a rough piece of road for you. May you be able to push on. Let me have a word to say how you are.
> With all my love and sympathy,
> Ivy[78]

The last chapter of Jack's last book, *Storm and Peace*, is entitled 'Tranquillity'; it concludes:

> Once, long ago, I was walking through the magnificent aisles of Ely Cathedral. The vast pillars soared up. The great length of the nave and the enormous height of the roof, the profound stillness, the shadows and the light, filled me with an inexpressible sense of the majesty of the peace of God. I looked up and found myself standing beside a seventeenth century memorial. After a long recital in stately prose of the life of the deceased, all his activities, his struggles, his earthly cares, there was a single line which remains, and will ever remain, in my memory
>
> *Post Tempestatem Tranquillitas*
>
> After the Storm, Peace

Notes and References

I am grateful to the Provost and fellows of King's College, Cambridge for copies of the Beresford letters in the Browning Archive and to the Beresford estate for permission to use them. I am indebted to Mr Christopher Beresford for permission to use the portraits of his father and I am particularly happy to acknowledge the help of Rosemary Beresford; conversation and correspondence with her has been a great pleasure.

1. J. B. Beresford (ed.), *The Diary of a Country Parson* (1924)
2. *op. cit.*
3. J. B. Beresford (ed.), *The Poems of Charles Cotton, 1630-87* (1923)
4. J. B. Beresford, *The Godfather of Downing Street: Sir George Downing, 1623-84* (1925)
5. J. B. Beresford, *Storm and Peace* (1936)
6. J. & J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses, Pt. II (1752-1900)* (1922)
7. Correspondence with Miss Rosemary Beresford.
8. J. B. Beresford, *Country Parson* (1924), f/n to entry for 23 December, 1771
9. R. Beresford (ed.), *Journal, 1931/2 of John Beresford* (forthcoming).
10. 1901 Census, County of Wiltshire, Civil Parish of Easton Grey, RG 13/1915.
11. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
12. M. Asquith, *The Autobiography of Margot Asquith* (1920)
13. C. Clifford, *The Asquiths* (2002)
14. C. Clifford, *op. cit.*
15. Conversation with Rosemary Beresford.
16. *Twentieth Century Dictionary of National Biography.*
17. J. B. Beresford, *Gossip of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (1923), chapter on 'Holy Mr Herbert'.
18. L. P. Wilkinson, *A Century of King's, 1873-1972* (1980)
19. I. Anstruther, *Oscar Browning: a Biography* (1983)
20. N. Annan, *The Dons: Mentors, Eccentrics and Geniuses* (1999)

21. J. Steegman, *Cambridge: as it was and as it is today* (1940)
22. E. M. Forster, *Two Cheers for Democracy* (1951), essay on 'Cambridge'.
23. I. Anstruther, *op. cit.*
24. The Browning Archive is in King's College Library; JB's letters at OBi/A/Beresford, JB
25. Browning Archive
26. J. B. Beresford, *The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. III* (1927), f/n to entry for 13/1/1788
27. H. Spurling, *Ivy when Young: the early life of Ivy Compton-Burnett, 1884-1919* (1974)
28. Browning Archive
29. Browning Archive
30. Browning Archive
31. Browning Archive
32. J. B. Beresford, *The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. III*, f/n to entry for 6/12/1791
33. Browning Archive
34. R. Gathorne-Hardy (ed.), *Ottoline at Garsington: Memoirs of Lady Ottoline Morrell* (1974)
35. J. B. Beresford (ed.), *Journal 1931/2 of John Beresford* (forthcoming)
36. Browning Archive
37. W. B. Turrill, *The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew: past and present* (1959)
38. H. Spurling, *op. cit.*
39. *Who's Who, 1940*
40. R. Beresford (ed.), *op. cit.*
41. H. Spurling, *op. cit.*
42. R. Beresford (ed.), *op. cit.*
43. H. Spurling, *op. cit.*
44. H. Spurling, *op. cit.*
45. C. Clifford, *op. cit.*
46. H. Spurling, *op. cit.*
47. L. P. Wilkinson, *op. cit.*
48. D. MacCarthy (ed.), *Letters of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith to Friend* (1933)
49. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
50. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
51. Conversation with Rosemary Beresford
52. E. J. Howard, *Slipstream: a memoir* (2002)
53. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
54. *Who's Who 1940*
55. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
56. I am grateful to the late Margaret Sharman for copies of this correspondence.
57. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
58. J. B. Beresford, *The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. I*, f/n to entry for 13/4/1775
59. J. B. Beresford, *op. cit.*, f/n to entry for 3/5/1780
60. J. B. Beresford, *The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. II*, Introduction
61. *Times Literary Supplement*, 29/1/1931
62. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
63. N. Jones, *Rupert Brooke: Life, Death and Myth* (1999)

64. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
65. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
66. G. Brenan, *Personal Record: 1920-1972* (1974)
67. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
68. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
69. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
70. H. Spurling, *Secrets of a Woman's Heart: the later life of Ivy. Compton-Burnett, 1920-1969* (1984)
71. R. Beresford, *op. cit.*
72. J. B. Beresford, *The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. II*, f/n p. 71
73. J. B. Beresford, *The Diary of a Country Parson, Vol. III*, f/n p. 346
74. C. Bruyn Andrews, *The Torrington Diaries, 1784-1791, Vol. I*, general introduction
75. C. Bruyn Andrews, *op. cit.*
76. *Times*, 22/11/1940
77. PRO-UGC 1/2 Minutes
78. H. Spurling, *op. cit.* (1984)

CORRIGENDUM

Careless editing was, I am afraid, responsible for a mix-up in the review of *Godly and Righteous, Peevish and Perverse* on pp. 43-46 of the last Journal (Summer 2003). The paragraph on p. 44 begining, 'Firstly, of the authors . . .' should be replaced by the following two paragraphs:

> Firstly, of the authors from whose writings passages are included in the anthology, the dates of these nine approximate to Woodforde's own (1740-1803) – George Crabbe, William Cole, John Galt, Edward Gibbon, Oliver Goldsmith, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, John Wesley and Tate Wilkinson. Woodforde himself possessed books by three of them – Goldsmith, Smollett and Sterne (see *Diary* entries for 12 May 1790, 4 February 1785, 26 October 1761 and 4 December 1762).
>
> Secondly, from the included passages of authors prior to 1800 it is possible to deduce something of the Anglican view of the ideal priestly pastor, which Woodforde inherited through his ordination as deacon in May 1763 and priest in 1764, and thereafter sought to emulate in his ministry.

Apologies to the author, the Revd Brian Pateman.

WHALES TALES

What, you may ask, have stories about whales got to do with Parson Woodforde? But remember, anything can happen in Norfolk and usually does. Only in March this year a huge denizen of the deep grounded itself just off the North Norfolk coast and despite all efforts to get it back into safer deep water it breathed its last, soon to be made toothless by souvenir hunters miraculously having Swiss Army penknives or suitable saws about their persons.

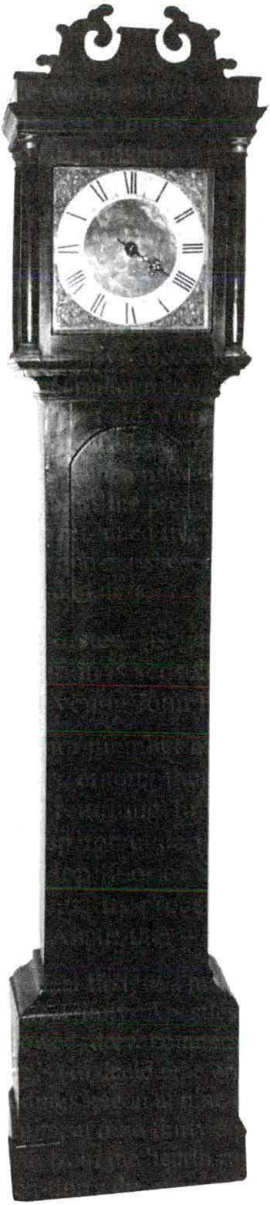
Whales have been seen plunging and blowing their way past the huge sandy beaches of Norfolk for hundreds of years, successfully pursued by wily East Anglian fishermen,[1] with two curious, quite different, outcomes, but both to do with shape. The light but strong and springy nature of whalebone commended itself for use in stays and corsets. The ladies of East Anglia were soon noted for their elegant poise and shape, factories to help produce the 'hour glass' look sprang up everywhere (even in Diss!) and the world became a much more beautiful place.

The other shapely outcome was not to do with torsos but with the cresting of the hoods or bonnets of longcase clocks. During the 18th and 19th centuries it was fashionable to top off such clocks with horns or swan necks facing each other, with three gilded balls, one in the middle and one on either side, adding great presence to this most important and useful piece of furniture. Now someone, somewhere in Norfolk, was fretting out some horns to complete the cresting of a clock when they had the fanciful thought that the horns or swan necks reminded them of the whales' tails that they had seen off the coast. A flick here, some spume there, was added, and the whales tails cresting, unique to East Anglia, was created. Nowhere else in the world are these charming and delightful excrescences to be found. (Just a very few turn up in the Americas where East Anglians crossed the water.)

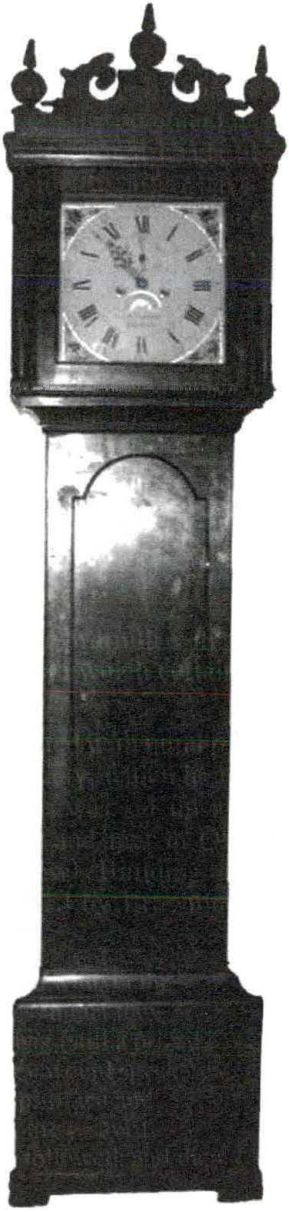
Now to the Parson Woodforde connection. On 31 August 1776 he wrote in his diary,

> M^{r}. Symonds of Reepham brought home my new Clock, to Day and put the same up – for which I p^{d}. him – 6: 6: 0
> It is a very neat Clock and I like it much –

Perhaps it is because he wrote the diary for himself and not for 'us' that he didn't describe the clock, he knew exactly how it looked. We are left to speculate and conjecture as to how the clock looked.



Whales tails on a fine 30 hour brass dial with single hand, pre-Woodforde's.



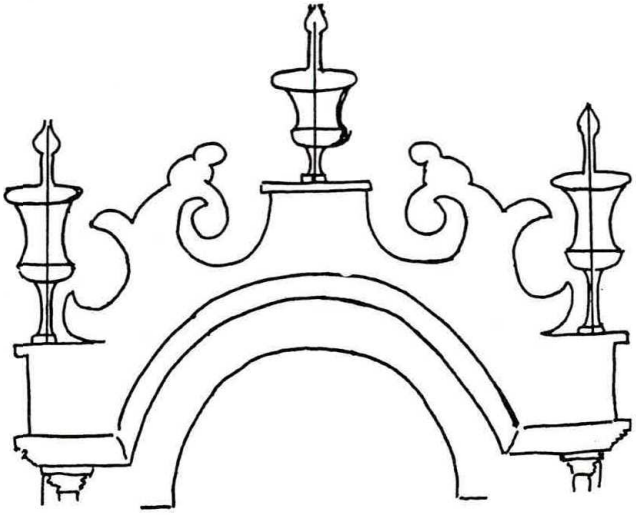
Parson Woodforde's clock? 8 day two handed white dial with original gilded turned wooden balls on top.

But as so often happens, discreet enquiries of some of our members brought forward positive information and photographs of eight longcase clocks by John Symonds. Three clocks in particular stood out. One was a very fine 30-hour clock with a brass dial and single hand, in an oak case pre-Parson Woodforde's. The next was the painted or white dial 8-day clock in an oak case which is the best contender to be the actual one owned by Woodforde, and the last was an 8-day painted dial in a mahogany case, post-Parson Woodforde.

All three clocks have whales tails cresting of amazingly similar design. A quick telephone call to the somewhat bemused owners requesting a rubbing of the cresting on their clocks resulted in imprints arriving to be compared. They fitted almost exactly, sufficient to suggest that either the crestings came from the same hand or from the same template. Much work has yet to be done on researching possible case makers, but meantime we can be reasonably certain as to the appearance of the Rectory clock and know that the Parson was no stranger to whales' tails!

Note

1. An exhibition on the history of the whaling industry on the north Norfolk coast can be seen at the award-winning True's Yard Museum in North Street, King's Lynn.



MEMORIES OF MARGARET

Since the publication of the obituary to Margaret Sharman (*Journal*, Winter 2002), Peter Jameson has received this letter from a friend in Canada, Jim MacDougall.

Here are a few of our memories of Marg. We met Margaret in 1975 in Nairobi, Kenya when we joined the Nairobi Music Society as singers. Marg was an accomplished cellist and played in the Nairobi Orchestra. Both organizations collaborated on many occasions to perform major works such as the Mozart, Haydn and Brahms Requiems, the Messiah, Elijah, Sampson etc. with musicians of great ability and high standards. Our connection was immediate. Her probing intelligence, sensitivity and confidence, her enjoyment of others and sheer sense of fun endeared her to Connie and me from the start and a wonderful friendship developed and grew even after 1981 when we left Kenya for Canada and she eventually returned to the UK. She was highly regarded for her scholarship, resourcefulness and diligence in the 'book' business while she was in Kenya working for a British publishing firm with her colleague, Neville Chittick. In 1987, Marg came to stay with us for a week in rural Ontario and it was a great time shared. I attempted a portrait of her that was a disaster and sent us all into gales of laughter and mercifully is no longer in existence. Neither Margaret nor I wished to be remembered by it! She adored her family and spoke of their adventures enthusiastically and often. Connie and I feel deeply privileged to have been her friends. Thanks for asking us to indulge these pleasant memories.

We had just recently come to you from the alumni reunion of the Nairobi Cathedral Choir in Bath where we sang an evensong service together. At the outset of the service the vicar, who had worked at the Cathedral in Nairobi years ago, began with a moment's silence as we remembered our friends who had died, and the last name he read out was Margaret's. Several days later, sitting in your home leafing through the publication you have been editing and turning to the beginning page only to find it dedicated to Marg Sharman was truly stunning. Then to find that you two had become friends as well . . . are these coincidences not awesome!

BOOK REVIEWS

Peter Jameson (ed.), *The Diary of James Woodforde*, Vol. 13: 1791-1793 (The Parson Woodforde Society, 2003) pp. 361, ISBN: 0 9530364 7 2

The latest volume to be published in the complete edition of Parson Woodforde's Diary is among the most interesting in the whole magnificent series, since it covers events of great importance to the household at Weston. At a local level there was the illness of the squire's wife and the subsequent removal of the entire Custance family to Bath in 1792. In the following year it was the turn of Woodforde and his niece to move, this time to Somerset, for a visit lasting some fourteen weeks – though this included stops in London and Bath, and, on the return journey, at Oxford. Meanwhile, events on the continent were casting their shadow even over rural Norfolk. In June 1791 Woodforde included a reference to the attempted escape of the King and Queen of France and their subsequent arrest and forced return to Paris. In December 1792 he expressed his indignation against the 'wicked brutes' who were said to have put the young rulers to death. As it happened, this was a false rumour, but on 19 January 1793 the parson noted that in the opinion of the 'public papers' there were 'very small hopes at present of the King of France long remaining here upon earth, his bloodthirsty enemies being so wicked and inveterate against him.' A week later he recorded that Louis XVI had been 'inhumanly and unjustly beheaded on Monday last by his cruel, bloodthirsty subjects' and added the comment that 'dreadful times, I am afraid, are approaching to all Europe – France the foundation of all of it.'

These fears were widely shared among upholders of the traditional order in England, and there was 'much talk', according to Woodforde, of 'mobs rising in many parts of the kingdom, especially Norfolk – a great number of clubs about the county and city, who style themselves "Resolution-Men, *alias* "Revolution-Men".' Woodforde was appalled at the prospect of disorder, and he placed the blame for it squarely on the shoulders of the revolutionaries in France and their English supporters – prominent among them the radical, Tom Paine. He prayed God to 'prevent all bad designs against old England,' and in January 1793 he noted with scarce-concealed satisfaction that 'the effigy of Tom Paine and a fox's skin were hung on a gibbet and afterwards burnt. A barrel of beer was given on the occasion.' One of the many useful

notes in this edition reminds us that the fox's skin was a symbol for Charles James Fox, whose liberal sympathies led him, at the outset, to welcome the revolution, but who later condemned its excesses. Woodforde was obviously not an admirer of Fox, and during his stay in London, *en route* for Somerset, he paid two shillings for a caricature of the Whig statesman that presumably highlighted his less attractive features.

The properties classes in England quickly learnt the lessons that France so vividly provided and took steps to defend the constitution. Associations were formed for this purpose, local militias were marshalled to deal with any symptoms of disorder, and radical leaders were arrested and imprisoned. In December 1792 Woodforde expressed his profound relief that 'Revolution Clubs everywhere [are] much suppressed and Constitutional Societies daily increasing all over the kingdom.' All this meant that 'levelling principles and equality [were] almost discarded.' It is noticeable that the diarist never makes a direct link between poverty and discontent, though in November 1792 he mentioned the reports of widespread rioting about to take place throughout the country and commented that 'the lower sort of people that have nothing to lose [are] ripe for it.' In the previous October there had been rumours that a 'great mob' would gather at St Faith's fair in Norwich to protest at 'the dearness of wheat and other provisions,' but Woodforde was convinced that their action sprung 'from the late long propensity of the discontented to a general disturbance.' Yet high prices were causing very real suffering, even in rural areas. In December 1792 Woodforde gave the poor of Weston £1. 8. 0 which, at sixpence a head, means there were fifty-six inhabitants of a relatively small parish close to the bread line. Charity could help relieve their condition but could not deal with the basic causes. The total sum disbursed by Woodforde is minute compared with the £40 which he paid to his butcher a fortnight earlier for a year's supply of meat, and sixpence would not have bought the dinner of 'boiled pork and a goose rosted, etc.' which he consumed on that day.

Woodforde's innate conservatism was linked to his religious beliefs, for he took it for granted that the existing social order was of divine creation. He accepted that it was his God-given duty to look after the welfare of those in his service, but only on condition that they rendered satisfaction. When one of the maids developed a sore throat he gave her 'some blackcurrant rob and jam of the

same, with red wine and water to drink instead of beer,' but could not help observing that it was 'rather ungain for her to be ill, as tomorrow is our washing.' Another of the maids, Nanny Golding, disturbed the household by having a fit and screaming out 'most hideously and so loud that Ben heard her in a field beyond the cover, where he was hoeing turnips.' Woodforde dosed her with assafoetida drops in cold water, but some weeks later he gave her notice that she would have to 'leave my service at Michaelmas next, on account of her being subject to bad fits. I was sorry to do it, as she was – or at least appeared to be – a very good servant. I should have been glad to have kept her if I could, but fits are dreadful, they are so very alarming and come on so suddenly.'

There is a marked contrast in tone between the down-to-earth and even somewhat heartless entries on Nanny Golding and those on the squire's wife, Mrs Custance, who was suffering from ill health after her latest confinement. In January 1792 Woodforde unusually included a prayer in his journal for 'our most worthy and particular friend, Mrs Custance, now under very great affliction. May thy almighty goodness, O Lord, send thy restoring angel to her and bless every medicine made use of for her recovery.' He also prayed for comfort to be given to her 'most affectionate and loving husband, Mr Custance . . . and to their dear children health.' The relationship between the diarist and the dominant lay figure in the parish was a close and happy one. Reciprocal hospitality was the order of the day, and great efforts were made by both households to provide copious quantities of food. In November 1791 the diarist and his niece spent the afternoon at Weston House with a party that included William Beauchamp, Mrs Custance's half-brother. The assembled company was given for dinner – in mid-afternoon, as was the custom at the time – 'some fresh salmon and whitings, white soup, boiled chicken and pigg's face, a leg [of] mutton rosted, pork stakes, goose giblets and garden stuff.' The second remove consisted of 'a brace of pheasants and a brace of partridges rosted, trifle, jelly, blamange, rammerkins and some baked kind of cakes. Desert: pears and apples, almonds and raisins, some India sweetmeats, olives.' This feast was accompanied by Claret, Teneriffe and port, and it is hardly to be wondered at that Mr Beauchamp 'slept and snored a good deal' after the ladies had retired.

One can only admire Woodforde's capacity for staying awake and apparently sober. He never mentions having a hangover (or its

eighteenth-century equivalent) even though he partook liberally of various alcoholic potions. He was especially fond of port, which he thought had medicinal qualities, and drank a considerable quantity of it one Thursday in March 1793 to relieve the pain from a sore throat. On the following Sunday, however, he felt it wise to drink no port at all. Later that year, in November, after a restless night, he took a glass with some toast at midday which 'seemed to agree with me very well.' Later, at dinner, as he recorded on the blotting paper in large letters, 'I also made free with port wine – that is, drank six or seven glasses.' One might have expected him to feel the worse for wear on the following day, but in fact he had a good night's sleep and got up 'much refreshed and in good spirits.'In the afternoon he dealt roundly with a couple of boiled rabbits, a roasted bladebone of pork and a baked rice pudding, noting that he 'relished my dinner much and eat hearty.'

Nancy Woodforde was as welcome a visitor at Weston House as her uncle, especially when Mrs Custance felt too ill to come downstairs but wanted company. And the friendship between the two families extended to three of the squire's sons, Hambleton, George and William, who were at boarding school. In June 1791 Woodforde witnessed the reunion between them and their parents at Norwich, and commented that the 'three young gentlemen . . . looked extremely well and exactly as School-Boys should.' In the summer of 1792 'Master George Custance' walked over to the parsonage and spent an hour with the Woodfordes. A few days later all three boys came to call, accompanied by their cousin, 'Master Bacon'. On 30 May 1792 there were great rejoicings at Weston House, with bells ringing and guns firing, 'on account of Mrs Custance coming downstairs for the first time for the last five months.' Woodforde joined in the celebrations by giving his servants a bottle of gin, and two days later he went over to the squire's house to pay his respects to the invalid. Mrs Custance, he noted, was 'so well today as to go downstairs to dinner and to walk up also after dinner – great things!'

The Woodfordes' genuine joy at Mrs Custance's recovery was intensified by the fact that there were very few families within easy radius of Weston with whom they could socialise. The parson held Mr Custance in high regard, describing him as 'my ever respected squire,' and it needs little imagination to sense how shocked he and Nancy must have been when, on the first day of September 1792, the squire paid them a long morning visit and broke the news that

his wife's health was still fragile and that the entire family was therefore moving to Bath. A month later the Custances were almost ready for departure and Woodforde confided to his journal that 'we shall most severely feel the loss of such good and very friendly neighbours.' On 7 October, at about ten in the morning, 'Mr and Mrs Custance, with five of their children with two nurses and Rising, the butler,' left Weston, in their coach-and-four and a post-chaise. 'It made us quite low all the whole day,' Woodforde recorded. 'It is a great, very great loss to us indeed.' The diarist and his niece did not see the family again until June 1793, when they spent a few days at Bath, *en route* to Somerset. 'We found Mrs Custance very well indeed,' noted Woodforde, 'and all her eight children. They were very glad to see us and desired us to dine with them tomorrow.' On their return journey, in October, the Woodfordes stayed at the White Horse Inn, 'kept by one Pickwick,' where Mr Custance came to call on them and invite them to dinner. A few days later they took tea with the Custances, but on the following day, at six in the morning, they set off for Oxford, on the next stage of their journey to Weston, leaving the squire and his family settled in to their new life. Woodforde was 'happy to be home,' but some weeks later he and Nancy went over to Weston House 'and walked over most part of it.' They found it in good condition but rather cold. This they attributed, no doubt correctly, to the lack of fires in the rooms, but the coldness also reflected the absence of the owner. Was this perhaps why the parson felt 'so very low' later in the day and spent a restless and uneasy night?

Woodforde emerges in this volume of his journal as far more than a philistine trencherman. Music moved him deeply, and when, in August 1792, he heard some Handel in Norwich Cathedral he found 'it was not only delightful but seemed heavenly and gave us ideas of divine music.' Moreover, although most of his journal entries are laconic, he had a gift for a good phrase. On one occasion when he felt unwell, he described his symptoms as being like 'cold streams running over my shoulders,' and on another he summed up Nancy's brother, William Woodforde, by noting that he and his wife 'sport away in their second-hand flashy one-horse chaise with plated furniture.'

It could be argued that Parson Woodforde's journal is not unlike a letter from one of his nieces, which he dismissed with the comment that it contained 'a great deal about nothing at all,' but this would be a misjudgement. In fact the multitude of incidents, descriptions

and observations recorded in these pages bring us close to that late-eighteenth-century society which seems in some ways familiar but in others totally alien. Woodforde, in short, is our key into the world we have lost.

R.W.L.

Yours Reverently (1948-57); *The Parson Knows (1953-68)*; *The Vicar Calls (1968-82)*, ed. Michael Wilmott, illustrated by Andy Jones; Bishop Street Press, Shrewsbury SY2 5HA. Price £11 inc p&p, or £15 for two books, or £25 for complete set.

These three handsomely produced softback volumes are compiled from the Parish Notes of the Revd Oliver Leonard Wilmott and chronicle life in the combined West Dorset parishes of Loders, Dottery and Askerswell over a period of more than three decades. Together they constitute a remarkable document: an epitome of life in rural England during a period of unprecedented social change. They are deeply parochial on the one hand yet always display a sharp awareness of what is happening in the world beyond and what it may mean not only for the folk of Loders and district but for Christendom itself.

The editor, the Vicar's son, has arranged the Notes into chapters with such broadly thematic titles as 'The Church's Year', 'From the Font to the Grave' and 'Country Calendar'. Here are two typical entries from a chapter in the first volume entitled 'Of Campanology, Male Chauvinism and Bibulousness':

Remembrance Day
At Loders the morning service was impressive. Commander Streatfield's address touched exactly the right note, and the Dead March from 'Saul', as performed by the organist, made a fitting finale. A word of congratulation to the ringer who rang eleven o'clock on the tenor bell! To do this successfully he had to set the tenor at back stroke. Those who know the reluctance of tenors to be set at back stroke were prepared to hear it strike twelve, or even thirteen, which it did not.

The 'absorbent' part of the population
A change of landlords at a village inn is an important event for the absorbent part of the population, especially when the inn is the only one. The Blue Ball at Dottery has passed from the genial

presidency of Mr Blair to that of Mrs Beach, whose special claim on the goodwill of Dottery is that her mother, Mrs Fleet, once lived there. Mrs Blair is recuperating in a bungalow called The Shack, at West Bay.

The Vicar's trenchant opinions on demos, *Guardian*-readers and deaconesses will not always meet with approval – certainly not that of this reviewer – but his point of view, whether voiced from the pulpit, the saloon bar of the Crown Inn, Uploders or in the pages of *Parish Notes* was invariably expressed with intelligence, wit and a fine appreciation of comedy at its gentlest. The use of the third person may have occasionally led the less perceptive of Oliver Wilmott's parishioners to confuse the author with one of those smart-alec visitors down from London for the week-end but, by subtly distancing the dogma from the dog-collar, this proves a delightfully effective device: Anglican good humour at its most persuasive. Not that the humour can have been confined to the Vicarage. When, in 1961, the musician and comedian Vic Oliver – currently appearing at the Alexandra Gardens, Weymouth – was invited to judge the 'best preserved grandmother' competition at the church fête, the Vicar felt brave enough to opine that: 'Never before has mutton looked so lamb-like'! Martyrdom must surely have beckoned.

Anyone who is accustomed to go to Parsons Woodforde and White the better respectively to understand the human and the wild-life of the English countryside will relish Parson Wilmott.

M.L.B.

FINAL ENDPIECE

I hope you will forgive some reminiscing of earlier days of our Society. Of a time when Canon Wilson was our Chairman and all Frolics enjoyed hot sunny days. It was a time when no thought was given to hiring coaches for members to travel around; when the Journal was typed manually and copied on a forebear of the Xerox and when pound coins had yet to be invented.

Of course there was nothing particularly wrong with members snaking along the narrow country roads in their cars except perhaps when an innocent 'interloper' would join the procession and

inadvertently lead following vehicles on an alternative route with an unanticipated destination. Nothing wrong, and indeed whoever was awaiting the arrival of the missing convoy would be granted extra time to debate Woodefordian topics.

In substituting a coach we have both changed and I believe enhanced the Frolic. The worrying aspects such as navigation and parking are removed and an added benefit has often been a member serving as an on-board guide, using the microphone to point out relevant landmarks en route. I have yet to conclude whether or not a future journey could result in a raucous singsong, spurred on by an errant committee member grabbing the microphone. If so, then perhaps it will be out of sight of the paparazzi that seem to be taking increased interest in our Society!

More recent advances for the Society have been the adoption of the computer. This has enabled the rapid and more error-free production of the Journal and Society Publications. Indeed our rate of Publications has been remarkable and the contribution that this makes to the appreciation of 18th century life has I believe yet to be fully recognised. More visible to the general public is our web site, enabling more individuals to become aware of Woodforde and the Society. I like to feel your committee both serve our members' interests and reflect our charitable status through these activities.

On an individual level we have seen the passing of many dear friends whose companionship we miss, but whose memories we treasure.

For me my many years of Society membership will continue. However it is time that my Chairmanship of your Society should come to an end. I am confident that this change is for the better. Please allow me one more act of indulgence, namely to thank all members of the Society and in particular the committee. Together you have made my years as Chairman enjoyable and fulfilling.

NIGEL CUSTANCE

THE PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY

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

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

The Annual membership subscription of £12.50 (overseas members £25) becomes due on 1 January and should be forwarded to the Treasurer, Dr David Case, 25 Archery Square, Walmer, Deal, Kent CT14 7JA.

The Parson Woodforde Society is a registered charity no. 1010807

DICKINS PRINTERS CASTLE CARY SOMERSET 01963 350110