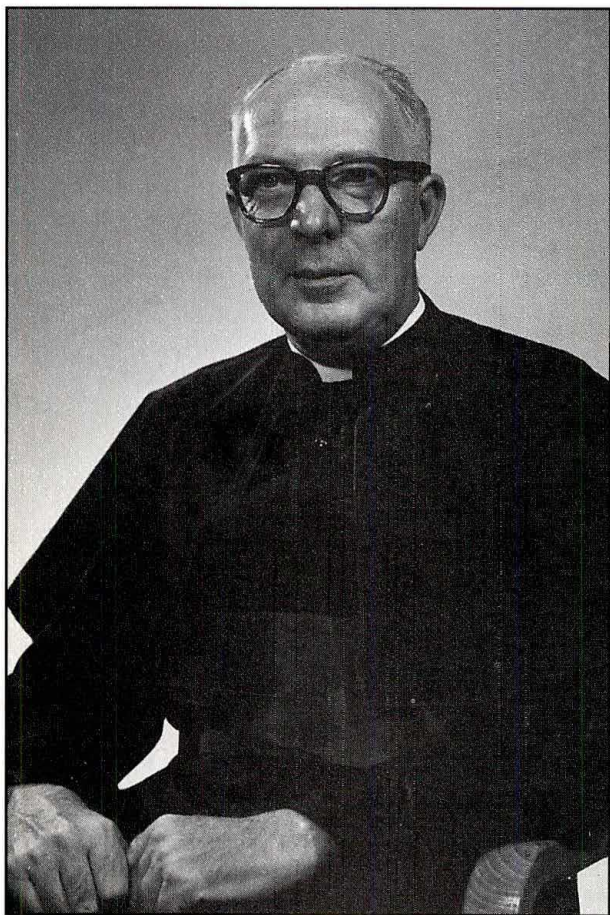


# PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY

Quarterly Journal



THE REV. CANON LESLIE RULE WILSON

Founder of the Parson Woodforde Society  
Chairman (1968-1974) and Life President

James [Woodforde] kept a remarkable Diary first at Oxford, then Ansford and Weston beginning 1759 and continued almost to his death. It is beautifully written and records his daily round most minutely, and it will become more and more valuable as time goes on for the light it throws on the customs and manners of the period. James' relations and friends are constantly mentioned and so are his many journeys to London, Somerset, Oxford &c. James has the reputation of being a good man and an excellent clergyman and the Diary bears this out. His health was not good, he seems to have had an occasional Epileptic fit and later on suffered much from Gout and towards the end he had Dropsy. The Old Rectory where he and his niece Nancy lived has been pulled down.

– Dr. R. E. H. Woodforde: Family Book  
(unpublished)

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*Issued to Members of the Parson Woodforde Society*

*Chairman*

Dr Nigel Custance  
77 Bishopstone  
Aylesbury  
Bucks  
HP17 8SH

*Editor*

Roy Winstanley  
6 Corville Road  
Halesowen  
West Midlands  
B62 9TJ

*Membership Secretary*

Phyllis Stanley  
76 Spencer Street  
Norwich  
Norfolk  
NR3 4PD

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## EDITORIAL

James Woodforde was born in the month of June 1740, and we are nearing the time of his 257th birthday. It is a long time since he came into the world. Yet, largely owing to the researches of the Parson Woodforde Society, we feel that we know everything about him, the man who wrote the famous diary as well as the diary itself. The Society is in its thirtieth year, and in that very much shorter time its genesis may have seemed more than once to be already in some respects vanishing into the mists of oblivion. Very fortunately, a rapid growth of interest among members in the way the Society began, its origins and establishment, and the discussion aroused by that interest, has now resulted in the important essay by David Case which I have the honour to introduce to our readers in this number of the Journal. Admirably lucid and replete with factual detail drawn from our own archive and the reminiscences of some of the more long-standing members, it will I am sure be welcomed by all those who have an interest in the story of the Parson Woodforde Society.

As for the other contributions to the issue, the balance has once again been maintained between Somerset and Norfolk. We have Robin Gibson, writing as always entertainingly, on Castle Cary, Ansford and the friends of the diarist's younger days, while from East Anglia comes the baptism of a child named after Job's daughter, told by Martin Brayne.

The second volume of the Society's edition of James Woodforde's diary is now out. Like its predecessor, it is a completely new book, revised, corrected and with many of its notes re-written. This may be a useful opportunity for me to reaffirm that the title of the edition as a whole has been changed. The terms "Ansford I" and "Ansford II" have been eliminated, although they are retained as sub-titles to make it absolutely clear what is being referred to on the cover. They are replaced by the words *Diary of James Woodforde*, Volumes 1 and 2. As and when subsequent volumes are re-issued, they will have the following titles:

*Diary of James Woodforde* –

Volume 3	(Ansford III)	1766-1768
Volume 4	(Ansford IV)	1769-1771
Volume 5	(Ansford V)	1772-1773
Volume 6	(Oxford & Somerset)	1774-1775
Volume 7	(Norfolk I)	1776-1777

Volume 8 (Norfolk II)	1778-1779
Volume 9 (Norfolk III)	1780-1781

The clear and obvious advantages of this method of enumeration are, first, that they restore the chronological sequence to its right order and, second, that they avoid the awkward anomaly, forced on us by the then existing manner of publication, of listing 'Volumes 1, 2, 3' twice over.

R. L. WINSTANLEY  
*Editor*

#### VICE-CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

In the aftermath of so enjoyable a Frolic as that at Bath, many members will be wondering why the Society has not met there before. As Ann Williams, who masterminded the whole enterprise, pointed out to us, the links with James Woodforde are not especially strong, but he knew Bath and would recognise much of what we are still able to see there. Even the occasional heavy shower failed to mar the week-end of which it might be said, as Woodforde said of the White Hart Inn in 1793, "everything in stile". For my own part – and I am sure I am not alone – I prolonged the enjoyment by reading our guest-speaker Trevor Fawcett's absorbing anthology *Voices of Eighteenth Century Bath*. Next year's AGM and Frolic will be at New College, Oxford in September; an experience which we very much hope will be well worth the wait.

The Society's latest edition of the diary, Volume II, covering the years 1763-1765, is now available (see Newsletter for details), replacing the old *Ansford II*. The volume includes a new introduction, 285 pp of diary (cf 29 pp in Beresford), 42 pp of Roy Winstanley's scholarly and stimulating notes and a comprehensive index. There can be little doubt that this is the Society's most ambitious project to date: a must for all Woodfordeans.

Finally, and, in the absence of our Chairman, self-indulgently, here is a diary entry for 19 July 1764:

I christened a Child of Young Patty Upcott that  
was, this Morning at Cary Church for M<sup>r</sup>. Penny –  
Patty Upcott has not been married three Weeks –  
She married young Brayne of Cary a Tallow –  
[continued on blotting paper] Chandler –

All human life is there!

M. L. BRAYNE

# THE PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY: CONCEPTION, BIRTH AND INFANCY

## *Introduction*

In a recent issue of the Journal<sup>1</sup> our Editor queried the identity of the "Founder Members of the Parson Woodforde Society" and in a single page he adroitly summarised the roles of Mr Beresford and Canon Wilson, in bringing Woodforde into the public domain and in the creation of the Parson Woodforde Society, respectively. Beresford's part in this story has been adequately told,<sup>2</sup> but scanning through the Index to our Journal Contents<sup>3</sup> I could find no reference to an account of the formative stages of the Society or of Canon Wilson's initiative; even the earliest issues of the Journal are modestly quiet about our conception. For some of our senior members I suppose that this is all "just a few years ago" and not yet really "history". However, as we approach our thirtieth year, it may be appropriate to attempt to set down the early record and to fill this gap in our documentation. The account may be of particular interest to those who have joined the Society in recent years and are less aware of our infancy.

We have therefore gone back into our archives and also enlisted the assistance of those who appear from the records to have been members of the Society since 1968 – the year the Society was formed. This article is based partly on their recollections, for which we are most grateful. No doubt our efforts to draw the information together will stimulate further memories and I anxiously await the additions and corrections to this account. I apologise for the intrusive number of references which have been included in the text but feel it is important to record the sources which have been used.

## *The Rev. J. E. Wynne-Roach*

The Rev. Mr Wynne-Roach was Rector of Weston Longville from 1949 until his death in 1971<sup>4</sup> and as a preface to our own story we should reflect that for many years he was the local incumbent who fielded all manner of enquiries about Parson Woodforde, the diary, the church, the locality and its history. Woodforde enthusiasts made their way to Weston, often it seems with the 'World's Classics' volume in their pockets, wanting to learn more.

In a letter to the *Eastern Daily Press*<sup>5</sup> the Rev. Mr Wynne-Roach noted that, before the second World War, he had inherited a portrait

of Woodhouse's friend du Quesne and this had first aroused his interest in Woodforde. On becoming rector of Weston, he "set about restoring the image of Woodforde". He mentions that a "Canon Boston tried to form a Woodforde Society which met and dined at Dereham" but gives no further details. It was the Rev. Mr Wynne-Roach who first learnt that Woodforde's portrait was to be auctioned in London and, thanks to the subsequent intervention of Mr Charles Clutsom, the portrait was secured and presented to the church.<sup>5</sup>

Mrs Nancy Downton (formerly Mrs Clutsom), who was one of the churchwardens at Weston, writes about the Rev. Mr Wynne-Roach and comments that "He was a great Woodforde fan and a great deal of his time was spent in connection with the Woodforde Diaries, and indeed I know his desire and intention was to form a Woodforde Society" – but this seems to have been confounded by his ill-health.<sup>6</sup>

### *The Proposed Parson Woodforde Society*

For those who read widely, or regularly browse through journals and publications which address a subject of general interest, there is a very special flush of excitement when the eye unexpectedly falls upon a topic which is of direct personal significance for the reader. Such must have been the excitement of a small band of "Woodforde fans" (as they would soon be dubbed) when, on perusing the notices in the Personal Column of the *Times*<sup>7</sup> of 7 December 1967, their eyes fell upon the following:

PARSON WOODFORDE. The many who have enjoyed "The Diary of a Country Parson" and who would be interested to hear of the proposed Parson Woodforde Society are invited to write for particulars to Box 0266 K. The Times.

The person we must picture anxiously awaiting any responses to Box 0266 K was the Rev. Canon Leslie Rule Wilson of The Rectory, Winterbourne Stickland, Blandford, Dorset.

His advertisement was listed among others promoting *The Institute of Ophthalmology*, *The Monarchist League*, *The Florence Nightingale Hospital*, *The Mission to Deep Sea Fishermen*, *The Road Safety Society*, *The Envoy Magazine*, *The Spectator*, and *The*

*Times Literary Supplement*, to name but a few! The “Woodforde fans” who found this advertisement were no doubt ardent and attentive browsers!

Canon Wilson was born in 1909 and died in 1991. In the course of his 40-year ministry he held ten ecclesiastical appointments and most of his career was spent overseas; he returned to England in 1967 and became rector of Winterbourne Stickland. A more detailed account of his career will be found in the obituary written by Mr Roy Winstanley for our Journal.<sup>8</sup> Canon Wilson clearly had an extraordinary interest in “Beresford’s Woodforde” and we may speculate that his reading was largely done while abroad. We can only wonder at the enthusiasm which he brought to the Woodforde cause, having returned to England, with opportunities to visit Somerset and Norfolk. Canon Wilson recalled:

When I arrived home in 1967 from abroad with the idea of founding the Society I was met at Southampton by my brother who drove me straight to Castle Cary where I stayed for a week at The George making up my mind as to the best approach to such a venture. It can be truly said that the plans for the Society came to fruition in Ansford and Castle Cary ...<sup>9</sup>

It seems that the *Times* advertisement was placed soon after Canon Wilson returned to this country; but this seems to have been discussed in Norfolk. Mrs Downton recalls: “I was present with both Rev. Wynne-Roach and Canon Wilson over a cup of tea at our house when the idea of putting the advertisement in the *Times* was discussed.”<sup>6</sup>

*A ‘Scheme’ to set the Society going – and “our foundation members”*

The credit for taking the step of launching the “proposed Parson Woodforde Society” must undoubtedly rest with Canon Wilson, but we have to assume that he had consulted with others known to him, who shared his love of Woodforde. One was obviously the Rev. Mr Wynne-Roach, and Mrs Downton reminds us that he “was a very close friend of Canon Wilson [who] often visited Weston.”<sup>6</sup>

Mr Winstanley has commented<sup>8</sup> that:

Although perhaps not the “onlie begetter” (he seems from the first to have been closely associated with a small group of enthusiastic friends, such as Francis Steer, John Tillett and Ivan Coughtrey) he was undoubtedly the leading force in what Parson

Woodforde would have called a "Scheme" to set the Society going.<sup>10</sup>

Dr Francis Steer was Archivist of New College, Oxford. Mr John Tillett clearly played a financial role as he is noted as 'Auditor' on his membership card<sup>11</sup> and is described elsewhere as being of "Barclay's Bank Norwich".<sup>12</sup> He was clearly an ardent collector of historical documents relating to Weston.<sup>13</sup> Mr Coughtrey was one of the churchwardens at Weston.<sup>14</sup> Steer and Tillett were to become members of the first Society Committee<sup>12</sup> and all three of those named by Winstanley became members of the Society from the outset.

However, it seems beyond doubt that *six* individuals must have responded with particular alacrity to that first advertisement in the *Times* and the evidence for this is to be found<sup>15</sup> in an obituary written by Canon Wilson for Mr J. W. C. East in 1973:

Mr East was one of the six people who replied to my notice in the Personal Column of 'The Times' in 1968 when I invited Woodforde-lovers to get in touch with me, and so was one of our foundation members.

It is this note which has entered the Society folklore, specifying "six foundation members". So – who were the other five? And did this arithmetic exclude those with whom Canon Wilson may have consulted *before* placing his advertisement?

With regard to the analagous title of "Founder Member" there may always be some confusion. A 'Founder Member' could well be variously defined as: one of "the six people who replied" to the first notice in the *Times*; one of the many people who attended the inaugural meeting of the Society in April 1968; or one of the many people who simply joined the Society in its first year.<sup>16</sup>

However, one must surely prefer and respect Canon Wilson's definition of "a foundation member". I am coming round to the opinion that only six people responded to that very first advertisement. It was after all a very small notice, listed among many other items, and we should note Canon Wilson states that:

Mr East was one of the six people who replied to my notice ...

He doesn't say "one of the people" or "one of the first people". The number six still featured clearly in his memory five years after placing that first notice in the *Times*; perhaps we should consider

whether Canon Wilson may actually have been devastated by the slim response to Box 0266 K!

But in debating the subject of our foundation members we have anticipated events.

*“The six people who replied to my notice”*

Mrs Audrey Field writes to say that her “introduction was through the original Times advertisement”; at an evening class on antiques the lecturer recommended Woodforde’s diary “as a wonderful means of assessing the social climate of the period ... within a few days I saw the famous advertisement!”<sup>6</sup> Mr David Gould and Professor W. N. Everitt also recall responding to the first *Times* advert.<sup>6</sup>

So, now perhaps we have three of those first six names. Two further obituaries,<sup>17</sup> one written by the then Mrs M. Nunns in 1970 and the other by Canon Wilson in 1971 may, perhaps, allow us to add to this list:

We regret to record the death of one of our foundation members,  
The Rt. Rev. J. L. Wilson, KCMG.

We have also lost another of our very keen foundation members,  
Mr Anthony M. Freeman, MBE, FSA, MA ...

So, if we can be confident that Mrs Nunns and Canon Wilson used the designation “foundation member” to have a specific meaning, we may now have all six names: East, Field, Gould, Everitt, Wilson, and Freeman. This at least may stand as the hypothesis until tested further!

I suppose we have to be cautious: for Canon Wilson those first six respondents must have been rather special – his “foundation members”. However, all those who attended the inaugural meeting of the Society may quite reasonably be called “foundation members” and may even have been addressed in that manner by Canon Wilson himself. Later commentators may have considered that all those who joined the Society in its first year deserved the same title.

All the following are described in their obituaries<sup>18</sup> as “Founder Members”: Mr J. L. Chalcroft, Mr L. N. Griffiths, Miss M. Barham Johnson, Mr S. J. Pick, Dr F. Steer, Miss C. S. Symonds and Mr J. Tillet. They all joined the Society in 1968. I have checked through all the membership cards (nearly 800) for both past and present

members to see whether Canon Wilson annotated any of them in a particular way, but found no further clues.

*“There are quite a goodly number of people”*

Very soon after placing his notice in the *Times*, Canon Wilson wrote to the early responders. His letter,<sup>19</sup> undated and quoted in full below, contains the following messages:

This letter will reach you about the beginning of January ... arrangements have been made for flowers to be placed on the grave of Parson Woodforde ... on January 1st the 165th anniversary of his death ...”

As the 165th anniversary fell on 1 January 1968, it all suggests that this letter was drafted and sent out round about Christmas 1967. The full text reads as follows:

#### Proposed Parson Woodforde Society

Thank you for your reply. I have found during the past years that there are quite a goodly number of people who have received much enjoyment from the Diaries of Parson James and who have suggested that it would be a pleasant thing to bring together in fellowship those who regard themselves as Woodforde “fans”.

The Society I had in mind would be quite an informal one; but the bond of fellowship could be maintained by

- (1) The issue of a simple quarterly paper dealing with some aspect of the places and peoples mentioned in the Diary,
- (2) A gathering of the members in the summer at Weston Longville,
- (3) A possible annual Woodforde Rotation Dinner in London, when we could meet socially and have a paper read on some aspect of the Diarist and his friends.

I have collected, during the past years when I have been in England, a certain amount of material on visits both to Weston and Ansford; and possible subjects for the quarterly papers might be

- (1) The Old Parsonage at Ansford:

The house has been purchased by a great admirer of the Diarist and he has restored it in the most admirable way to what it was like when Parson James lived there. He has found some interesting links with the Diarist. Some of the original portraits of the family, painted by Samuel Woodforde RA, have been given to the new owner by Mr John Woodforde and are now hanging in the Old Parsonage.

(2) Weston Longueville Parish since 1803:

In recent years some excellent murals have been uncovered on the walls of the church

(3) The remarkable will of the Rev Thomas Roger Du Quesne.

(4) The activities of the Diarist as a Freemason.

(5) The subsequent history of Weston House and the Custance family.

(6) Extracts from the Diary of Dr John Woodforde (1836) of Adelaide, S. Australia. He was the direct descendant of Rev. John Woodforde, Rector of Curry; who was the uncle of Parson James.

The Oxford Historical Society hope to publish shortly the portions of Woodforde's Diary covering the Oxford period 1759-1776, which is being edited by Dr W. N. Hargreaves-Mawdsley. Much of this has not been published before.

In time it might be possible for a Woodforde Society to encourage the republication of the original five volume edition of the Diary edited by the late John Beresford and which is now so difficult to procure.

I have a number of contacts in the Weston Longueville district that could make a 'pilgrimage' there in the summer of real interest. The Rector would be very willing to show us the "Custance" Register so beautifully kept by James Woodforde, and the church plate used by him. The excellent portrait of the Diarist painted by his nephew Samuel has been recently restored and is now hanging in the church. Visits could also be arranged to the Hart Inn – now a private house but very much as it was in 1790 – Berries Hall, the home of Mr du Quesne, and the Churches at Mattishall, East Tuddenham and Great Witchingham which figure often in the Diaries.

Weston House as the Diarist knew it is, alas, no more but the stables and outhouses were rebuilt into a very attractive house by the late Mr Clutson, who bought the site of the house and the park surrounding it. His widow is the present churchwarden of the Parish and she lives at Weston Covert which is on a part of the old Weston Estate. Mrs Clutson would be glad to arrange to have either a buffet lunch or afternoon tea in her garden if such a pilgrimage materialised.

If you would be interested to join the proposed Society, would you write and let me know (a simple form is attached below for your convenience in replying). Some subscription would be necessary to cover the costs of postage and circulation of the quarterly papers; but this, I think, would not exceed a guinea a

year. Such balance that remained after the expenses had been met would be given to the Restoration Fund of Weston Longueville Church, of which Mrs Clutsom is Hon. Treasurer.

If sufficient support is forthcoming, I would issue the first quarterly papers at the beginning of March and subscriptions should not be sent till it has been received. But I would like to know as soon as possible if you feel you would like to join such a Society.

This letter will reach you about the beginning of January, and you may like to know that arrangements have been made for flowers to be placed on the grave of Parson Woodforde, which is in the Church at Weston, on January 1st – the 165th anniversary of his death.

Sincerely yours

It is fascinating to see in this first letter most of the elements which contribute to our current *modus operandi*! The “quarterly papers” matured immediately into a quarterly Journal. The “gathering” has continued every year since 1968 but not just at Weston as suggested above; the opening sequence was Weston, Ansford, Oxford, Norwich! The Annual Rotation Dinner does not seem to have materialised, but the concept is perpetuated in our annual Dinner at the Frolics each year, when we normally “have a paper read on some aspect of the diarist and his friends.”

### *Further Notices*

At about the time the above letter was first sent out, presumably to those who responded to the *Times* notice, a further letter was placed in *Country Life* and a notice posted in the church at Weston.<sup>20</sup> It may be that the initial letter quoted above was deliberately *not* dated so that it could be sent at various times to those who responded to the different notices about “the proposed Parson Woodforde Society”.

The letter<sup>21</sup> in *Country Life* of 21 December 1967 read as follows:

#### PARSON WOODFORDE ENTHUSIASTS

Sir,—There must be many of your readers who have found great enjoyment in reading *The Diary of a Country Parson*, by the Rev. James Woodforde. It is proposed to form a Parson Woodforde Society, and I should be glad to send particulars to any of your readers who are interested.—L. R. Wilson (Canon), *The Rectory, Winterbourne Stickland, Blandford Forum, Dorset.*

Some of the responses Canon Wilson received must have caused him considerable excitement; for example this letter from Canada loaned to me by Mrs Rosemary Tait:

Having subscribed to *Country Life* during the past year I had occasion to notice your letter proposing a Parson Woodforde Society. As you will see by my name, I have reason to be interested ... we all have a special interest in the Diary, though not of the Woodforde family. Arthur C. Custance

Dr A. C. Custance was one of seven Custances who would join the Society in 1968.

Mrs Tait writes that her mother Mrs Olive Custance, widow of Wilfred Custance, saw the letter in *Country Life* and got in touch with Leslie [Wilson] – "... Leslie went down to Weymouth to visit her and the next thing I knew was that there was a Parson Woodforde Society". Similarly, Dr D. R. K. Street writes to say that he joined after his father-in-law had seen the *Country Life* advertisement.<sup>6</sup> Mr Sidney Quin (who became our Chairman in 1974) was told of the *Country Life* advert by his mother and "... I promptly applied for membership."<sup>6</sup> It is curious to note how many of our earliest members joined as a result of information passed on by an older generation – perhaps they were the attentive browsers of the time!

Mrs Clutsom was clearly the agent on the ground in Weston and as one of the churchwardens was probably instrumental in posting the notice there about the proposed Society. In the course of correspondence with Mrs J. M. Comper in early 1968, Mrs Clutsom passed on news of "... plans to form the Parson Woodforde Society ... We joined promptly and were amongst those at the first meeting ...".<sup>6</sup>

Canon Wilson's circular about the "Proposed Parson Woodforde Society" and his letter to *Country Life* were quickly publicized by Mrs Margaret Pickering, writing under the name of Elizabeth Harland, and the following are extracts from her column in the *Eastern Daily Press* for 31 January 1968:

January 23 ... I was most interested to receive today a letter from Dorset from a 20th century rector containing a proposal to found a Parson Woodforde Society, if sufficient support is forthcoming ... His letter in "Country Life" before Christmas has already brought over 100 replies, the proposer tells me, enclosing more

details and a tentative membership form. This ... I'm posting back by return. And I shall be delighted to pass on more information to other interested Woodfordians."<sup>22</sup>

*"Eighty people have asked to become members"*

Canon Wilson's second letter (again undated)<sup>19</sup> was clearly in response to those who had replied to his first; we only know that it was sent out no later than early March 1968 and presumably after the further notices had appeared in *Country Life* and at Weston Church:

Parson Woodforde Society

Dear Member

As eighty people have asked to become members, I feel that we are justified in forming the Society. I hope this number will increase as its existence becomes known, and I will be glad if you will help in any way you can in this.

As an inaugural gesture I am enclosing the current copy of *Norfolk Fair*, which includes two interesting articles on Parson Woodforde and some excellent photographs of places associated with him. I feel that the issue will give pleasure to many of you since our own quarterly papers could never produce photographs such as these. One of the articles is written by Mrs Pickering (under her pen-name, Elizabeth Harland) and I am indebted to her for mentioning the formation of the Society in her weekly column in the *Eastern Daily Press*.

Good News: The Clarendon Press is issuing, this Spring, a reprint of the original 5 volumes edited by John Beresford, which has been out of print since 1945. It will be priced at £6-10s, but this is good value, for the edition will have close on 2,000 pages with 27 plates. The current price of the original edition, second-hand (when procurable), is about £30!

Quarterly News Sheets: The first of these will be issued in the middle of March and will be on the History of Old Ansford Parsonage where the Diarist was born. It has been prepared by Mr & Mrs Meuse [actually 'Mewes'], the present owners of the house.

The following are planned for this year:

June – The History of the Parish of Weston since 1803, together with the recipe for the Charter and the story of how it was acquired.

September – A Memoir on the Rev. Roger Du Quesne and extracts from his remarkable will.

December – The History of Weston Hall and some of the “Squire’s” descendants.

The First Woodforde Rotation Dinner I am hoping to arrange in London on either April 23rd or 24th. It would be a great help if you could let me know within the next ten days if you hope to be present. The cost of a real Woodfordean repast would be prohibitive, but we can only get a price for a reasonable meal when we have some idea of numbers. I do hope as many as possible will try to come as it will provide an opportunity for meeting fellow enthusiasts, and discussing future plans and exchanging ideas.

The Pilgrimage to Weston is planned for sometime in the first fortnight of July, but full particulars of this will be sent later.

Finally, SUBSCRIPTION! This will be a guinea for this year (which includes the cost of *Norfolk Fair*), and I will be glad if you will send me a cheque for this amount made payable to Parson Woodforde Society. Receipts will not be sent unless asked for, as postage nowadays is such a heavy sum.

I do hope that you will find the Society of interest. Do write and let me know if you have any ideas for future quarterly papers or any items of Woodfordean interest.

[signed] L. R. Wilson

### *The First Journal and an Inaugural Luncheon*

The first issue of the Journal designated ‘Spring 1968’ was issued in March to “over 100 members”.<sup>23</sup> As promised, this first Journal contained an article on ‘The Restoration of the Old Parsonage’ by Mrs Bernard Mewes – and also recipes for the “Charter Pudding”. The early issues of the Journal were set up and printed in a converted stable adjoining a thatched cottage in Winterbourne Stickland! Truly, it seems, a labour of love.

One of the earliest of Canon Wilson’s supporters must have been Mr Oliver Heighes Woodforde, who writes:

... what happened was that Canon Wilson came to see me at the Church Commissioners at No. 1 Millbank (Westminster) with the idea of creating the Parson Woodforde Society ... I was persuaded in the end and suggested that the first meeting might be in the Board Room of the Church Commissioners at No. 1 Millbank.<sup>6</sup>

The cost of the proposed "First Woodforde Rotation Dinner" had proved prohibitive and in another undated letter <sup>19</sup> Canon Wilson announced that:

Through the good offices of Mr Oliver Woodforde (son of the late Dr R. E. H. Woodforde and great-great-grandson of Nephew Bill), I have been able to arrange, for members only,

A BUFFET LUNCHEON

on

TUESDAY, APRIL 23rd at 12.30pm

in the Conference Room at

1 MILLBANK, WESTMINSTER, S.W.1

Mr Woodforde will be present and will bring with him some of the original portraits done by Samuel Woodforde, the candlesticks owned by Parson Woodforde, Nancy's mirror, and a set of figures carved by Nephew Bill. I will also have on display, photographs of many of the churches and places so familiar to readers of the Diary ...

We are very fortunate ... to have Mr Woodforde with us. I hope that we will also have with us a descendant of Squire C<sup>u</sup>stance.

A detailed account of this Luncheon is given in our Journal<sup>24</sup> and in every respect the occasion was clearly a great success: "How Parson Woodforde himself would have enjoyed our gathering – once he had recovered from his surprise at being of so much consequence."

Mr Oliver Heighes Woodforde was the Official Solicitor to the Church Commissioners<sup>6</sup> and this was apparently the first time that the Commissioners had allowed "outsiders" to lunch there.<sup>25</sup>

Mrs Downton (formerly Mrs Clutsom), the churchwarden at Weston, was invited to attend the luncheon to represent the Rev. Mr Wynne-Roach:

I was asked to take the red leather Church Register which was the gift of Mr C<sup>u</sup>stance in 1783 ... and the population census of Weston [for 1801]. I have since realised the responsibility I undertook – thank goodness I did not leave these things on the train ...!"<sup>6</sup>

Judging from the Journal report it would seem that the collection of Woodfordeana assembled at this meeting has never been surpassed. There is no record of the total number of members

attending but it can be deduced from the report that the following were among those present: Mrs Baker ("of Lincoln", who wrote the Journal report), Mr Michael Custance, Miss Barham Johnson, Mr Graham Nunns, Mr T. J. Tillett, Canon L. R. Wilson, Mr Oliver Woodforde and his daughter, and Capt and Mrs Woodforde Scott. The Society's first Committee was formed at this meeting: Mr Oliver Woodforde, Mr Michael Custance, Mr Francis Steer, Mr T. J. Tillett, Mrs Clutsom, Mrs B. Mewes, and Canon L. R. Wilson "as Convenor".<sup>12</sup>

### *The Media get involved*

The inaugural luncheon in London was reported in the *Eastern Daily Press* on the very next day<sup>25</sup> and this was soon followed by a longer article<sup>26</sup> which gave further information about the diaries, the diarist, the new Society, and Canon Wilson's involvement in its formation. Here we find confirmation of Canon Wilson's early consultations:

I first read the diaries about 30 years ago and I had had it in my mind since 1950 to form the Society. When I got back to this country I sounded out a few people as I moved about. Here and there I came across Woodforde fans and I began to get busy.<sup>26</sup>

The name of Elizabeth Harland (Mrs Pickering) has been mentioned above and the formation of the Society featured in her articles in the *Eastern Daily Press*. Mr Jim Holmes writes:

She was very enthusiastic and gave great publicity to the formation of the Society and supplied Leslie Wilson's address – I promptly joined.<sup>6</sup>

I quoted just a few paragraphs from another<sup>27</sup> article from the same paper:

Nothing new here – nothing at all, but I am eager to write about it. This is a reprint of Parson Woodforde's Diary ...

Does anyone in East Anglia have to be reminded of the intimate delight of this diary and its value as social history? Nowhere else can one find, at its grass-roots, so complete a description of English village life in the second half of the eighteenth century. And it all happened in Norfolk ...

There is obviously valuable material about Woodforde's life at Weston Longville which has still to be printed and one hopes that

the newly formed Woodforde Society (may it thrive exceedingly) will not lose sight of this.

Prophetic words indeed!

So we see that the name of Woodforde was appearing in the Norfolk press in 1968 and no doubt many were hearing about the diarist for the first time, but he had already been given wider publicity two years earlier. Mr Jim Holmes, one of our Honorary Life Members, is a fine example of those "Woodforde fans" alluded to by Canon Wilson, who knew and loved the diaries long before Canon Wilson's initiative in forming the Society. Mr Holmes gave a thirty-five minute talk<sup>28</sup> about Woodforde on the BBC Home Service on 13 September 1966, while Canon Wilson was still in foreign parts.

It was one of a series on the great Diarists and I was very proud of getting Woodforde included ... of course I never heard it. My wife said it was all right.<sup>6</sup>

### *The First Expedition – and an expanding Membership*

The First Expedition of the Parson Woodforde Society to Weston and District took place on 6 July 1968 and is reported<sup>29</sup> in detail in the Journal; with this event, attended by over 60 members, the Society was well and truly into its stride.

The Expedition included visits to Weston church, the Old Hart, Weston Old Hall, the site of the New Hall, Mrs Clutson's home Weston Covert, Weston Rectory, Hockering Rectory, Mattishall church, Mattishall Hall, East Tuddenham church, Berries Hall, and finally Weston Village Hall, "where we partook of a welcome Dish of Tea". Canon Wilson must have had extraordinary organisational skills! Mrs Comper writes:

At these first gatherings members found themselves formed into a motorcade and we were led by Canon Wilson through the country lanes from one place of Woodfordean interest to the next.<sup>6</sup>

And Mr Quin:

I always remember Leslie Wilson's drive and enthusiasm at that meeting getting his flock together ... and not standing for any messing about!<sup>5</sup>

A list of members was published in 1968 (we only know that it appeared in or before October 1968) and this contains 149 names. I have wondered whether, in more recent years, this list has been consulted to ascertain who *joined* in that year and these members have been designated “founder members” based on this evidence. All six of those whom I have suggested may have been “foundation members” are included among these 149. A leaflet circulated towards the end of 1968 informed members of increased subscriptions – to 2 guineas! – and noted that there were 180 members.<sup>19</sup>

It seems that Canon Wilson may have placed further notices in the *Times* and our present Editor, Mr Roy Winstanley, who “began to read Woodforde as a teenager”, apparently joined the Society in response to one of these later advertisements,<sup>6</sup> although his name appears in the 1968 Membership List. His first article appeared in the *Journal* in 1969 and he edited his first issue in the Spring of 1970.

Publications such as the five-page article by David Duval in the *East Anglian Magazine* in 1969 undoubtedly drew further attention to Woodforde, although he omitted to mention the new Society:

We had a queer feeling of seeing what we knew and loved ... through a telescope which cheated time and admitted us direct to life there as it then was.<sup>30</sup>

However, in the same issue is a letter<sup>31</sup> by Canon L. R. Wilson, “Chairman Parson Woodforde Society”, entitled “The Charter Pudding”. It is noted that “The Charter served as a sweet at the first meeting of the Parson Woodforde Society held last year in London”; publicity with a pudding!

### *Conclusion*

My penultimate paragraph may contain a little piece of Woodforde history not previously recorded: Mr Oliver Woodforde writes<sup>6</sup> to enlarge on our knowledge of Beresford’s first encounter with the manuscript diary:

I was only a young boy but I think what happened was this – my father Dr R. E. H. Woodforde was GP at Ashwell and Beresford lived at Ashwell End nearby. My father’s waiting room only held

4 or 5 people and John Beresford would not wait outside (in the rain!) so was shown into our dining room. He did not look where he was going and trod on the 'points' of my Hornby train set laid out on the floor. He of course broke them and never offered to get me new ones – I have never forgiven him! The Diaries were in a book case and he asked my father if he could borrow a volume. He became fascinated by them and asked if he could publish them. My father reluctantly agreed but thought that they would not be of great interest or sell many copies.

The shape of this event has been described many times before but now we have a little more domestic colour to set it in perspective and it seems that all that followed may have been set in motion by a shower of rain! I have always thought that John Beresford has received more than his rightful share of criticism, for example:

The first Beresford volume is deeply flawed and nothing less than the immense prestige of O[xford].U[niversity].P[ress]. can have kept it going so long. Beresford was a cultured dilettante, not a scholar.<sup>2</sup>

However, the same commentator tells us: "To the surprise of everyone, The Diary was a best seller,"<sup>2</sup> and we surely have to keep clearly in our minds that, but for a shower of rain, and Beresford's intuitive appreciation of the value of the Diaries, to this day we may never have heard of James Woodforde. I, for one, am willing to forgive Beresford for his perceived shortcomings as a scholar.

In this article I have tried to record the earliest steps in the conception and development of the Society which occurred thirty years ago. I wonder what Canon Wilson would think of us today. His "proposed Parson Woodforde Society" is now a Registered Charity with a sizeable Committee and nearly 400 members scattered all over the world; with a covenanting scheme, two bank accounts, deposits in a building society and other investments. We now have a Newsletter, our Journal continues to thrive, and our list of publications continues to expand. Mrs Margaret Wilson tells us<sup>6</sup> that Canon Wilson: "... derived great pleasure from the way in which the Society has developed and flourished from such small beginnings". I would like to think that if he could read our excellent Journals and read the reports of our annual "pilgrimages", as he dubbed them, he would be well satisfied, and content that not a great deal had really changed!

## References and Notes

1. Journal XXIX, 4, 3.
2. See for example the Introduction to *Parson Woodforde – The Life & Times of a Country Diarist* by R. L. Winstanley; Morrow & Co. (1996).
3. Index to the Journal of the Parson Woodforde Society Vol I, 1– Vol XXVI, 1 (1968-1993).
4. See his obituary in Journal IV, 3, 56.
5. Letter to the *Eastern Daily Press*, 6 May 1968.
6. Personal correspondence February 1997.
7. The Times Personal Column was apparently not included in the 'Times Index' so it has not been possible to trace any later notices.
8. Journal XXV, 1, 5. An obituary also appeared in the *Daily Telegraph*.
9. Undated document by Canon Wilson (probably written in 1977) apologising for not being able to attend an AGM and containing proposals for the 1978 "Gathering". Found in the Society's archives.
10. At the Somerset "Gathering" in May 1988 Canon Wilson "named ... these three men who helped so much in the early days of the Society" (Journal XXI, 2, 29)..
11. The Society has an extensive archive of membership cards including those of former members. Comparison with early membership lists shows that the card collection is not complete.
12. Journal I, 2, 24.
13. Journal I, 2, 9.
14. Journal I, 3, 7.
15. Journal VI, 3, 52.
16. Our membership records include a list of 23 names designated "Remaining Founder Members at March 1991", but I deduce that these are members who joined in the first year (1968).
17. Journal III, 3, 1 (Wilson) and Journal IV, 1, p. 58 (Freeman).
18. The seven obituaries appear in Journal XXIV, 1, 3; VII, 1, 79; XXIX, 2, 20; VII, 1, 79; XI, 3, 39; XVI, 2, 45; IX, 2, 3, respectively.
19. Found in the Society Archives. I am grateful to Mr Martin Brayne for unearthing these items.
20. Journal XXV, 1, 6.
21. *Country Life*, 21 December 1967, p. 1665. I am grateful to Mr George Bunting for finding this item.
22. 'Diary of a Country Housewife', column in the *Eastern Daily Press*, Elizabeth M. Harland, 31 January 1968.
23. Journal I, 1, 3.
24. Journal I, 2, 7.
25. *Eastern Daily Press*, 24 April 1968.
26. *Eastern Daily Press*, 29 April 1968.
27. Mervyn Payne, *Eastern Daily Press*, 2 August 1968.
28. Mr George Bunting has a transcript of this talk in his extensive collection of Woodfordeana.
29. Journal I, 3, 7.
30. *East Anglian Magazine*, July 1969, 357.
31. *East Anglian Magazine*, July 1969, 385.

## ... BUT IT WAS THE NAME OF PHAROAH'S DAUGHTER

Between the beginning of 1776, the year in which Woodforde took up residence, and the end of 1802, the parish registers indicate that 311 children were baptised in Weston Longville: 160 females and 151 males. This essay is concerned with the names given to those children and other matters arising from the baptismal records, and to specific references to baptism made in Parson Woodforde's diary.

If we look, firstly, at the names given to girls, we find that a total of 30 different names occur but that they were very far from evenly distributed, the four most popular names (Mary, Elizabeth, Ann(e) and Sarah) being given to no less than 64% of the females christened. Mary was, by a long way, the most popular of these, being the name given to almost a quarter of all girls baptised in Weston during the period. Perhaps more surprising than the popularity of these names was the infrequency with which certain other names occur. There are, for example, only three Janes and but a single Catherine. For whatever reason Catherine was not a Weston name. The only child to which that name was given was herself the daughter of a Catherine, Catherine Chubbeck who, not having been married in Weston was, presumably, not a native. Likewise the only Catherine to be buried at Weston during the period, Catherine Girling, although no doubt related to the prosperous Weston farming family, is described by Woodforde as "the wife of M<sup>r</sup>. Girling a J.P. at Dereham". Her fine memorial can be seen set into the floor at the west end of Weston church.

The pattern among the boys is quite similar but rather more names were employed (35) and they were a little more evenly distributed, with the four most frequently occurring (John, William, James and Thomas) being given to 57% of the male children. As with the girls, a quarter of all boys were given the same name – John. By contrast, there was only one Peter, one Daniel and, surprisingly perhaps, given the frequency with which it occurs in the diary, only one Stephen. In *The Old-time Parson*, P. H. Ditchfield tells the story of the old rector who became so exasperated at the high-flown names proposed in answer to his question "Name this child", that he was driven to interrupt with, "I'll have no more of these fine names; I shall christen it plain 'John'." Needless to say, he was more than a little dismayed when in the vestry after the service he was informed

that the baby was a girl. There is no evidence that Woodforde exercised any such nominal censorship.

Of the more unusual names two attracted Woodforde's particular attention. On 30 June 1783 we read that he "privately named a child this morning of Dinah Bushell's by name Keziah, one of Job's daughter's names." It seems unlikely that this was William and Dinah Bushell's second daughter, an older child, Mary, having been christened in 1778. In the words of the Book of Job (Chap. 42, vv. 13-15) – "He had also seven sons and three daughters. And he called the name of the first, Jemima; and the name of the second, Kezia; and the name of the third, Kerrenhappuch. And in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren." But Keziah's older sister never reached adulthood:

... at Noon took a Walk to Weston Church and buried a Girl of Willm. Bushall aged 15. Years – She had been an Idiot almost from her Cradle and being often out of doors, was in continual danger of being run over by Carriages or Horses living on an open Green called Oldham-Green – The poor creature had been ill near a twelve month before it died – it must be a pleasure to her friends instead of grief, that her removal from hence must be happy in a future state – And pray God grant it so to be –

(13/3/1794)

Keziah and Mary's mother, Dinah, appears to have been an impressively robust woman as, following the birth of her son Robert in January 1787, Woodforde records:

I privately named a Child of Dinah Bushells this morning at my House by name Robert – The Mother brought the Child herself, though the Infant was only born the 18<sup>th</sup> of January – and the Mother quite hearty and strong –

(1/2/1787)

The other name which especially excited Woodforde's interest was that of the first-born child of John and Mary Reeves. Most of the couple's family had perfectly conventional Weston names (two Johns, Mary, Sarah and William) although the second child, a boy, was given a name which has subsequently become much more common – Howard. On a clear but biting cold day in March 1785, however, Woodforde christened the first of the Reeves children and made a particular note of it in his diary:

... I read Prayers, Preached & christened a Child by  
Name, Tabitha Bithia, this morning at Weston Church.  
M<sup>r</sup>. Custance and M<sup>r</sup>. Micklethwaite were at Church.  
Mem: Bithia is a very uncommon Name, but it was  
the Name of Pharoah's Daughter – See 1. Chron: 4-18 –  
It was a child of Reeves at the Hart – & a pretty Girl –

How, we wonder, did Mary and Johnny Reeves, as Woodforde sometimes refers to the landlord of the Hart, hit upon this unusual name? One suspects they simply opened the Good Book at random. Likewise, one wonders why two Marias were christened within 6 months of one another (Mary Wells's illegitimate little girl on 30 December 1793 and Henry and Martha Case's child on 16 June 1794)? May there not have been a nationwide increase in the popularity of this name following the wave of sympathy which accompanied the execution of Marie Antoinette in October of 1793? Little Maria Case died after 15 weeks so that when Henry and Martha had a second daughter the following year, she, too, was given the name Maria. And why did Dinah Bushell Junior, "a single woman", give her little daughter the name Honor – in a spirit of penance or defiance? In the year after the battle of the Nile there can be much less doubt as to what inspired John and Anne Woods to name their second daughter Hannah Nelson. What happened to the solitary Matilda? Born, illegitimately – spuriously, as Woodforde has it – in November 1797 to the 37 year-old Susannah Field, her mother died when Matilda was just 15 months old.\*

Social class appears to have had much less relevance to the choice of christian names than has been the case in more recent times. The annual list of most popular names appearing in the Births column of the *Times* has significantly more Timothys and Alices and fewer Ryans and Jades than are to be found among the population at large. Although some of the names chosen by Mr and Mrs Custance were unique, within the parish, to their family (Edward, Hambleton and Neville), it must be remembered that only one other couple – William and Anne Richmond – had so many children (11). The Richmonds – Anne was one of Woodforde's washerwomen – had one unique name (Daniel) and two others which only appear on one other occasion (Christopher and Edmund). Both families had a John

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\*This paragraph might suggest a higher rate of illegitimacy than was in fact the case at Weston. During the period covered by this essay, a total of 20 "spurious" births are recorded (6.4%). This, however, was notably higher than the figure for Ansford between 1754-70 (4.1%) and that for Castle Cary between 1764-68 (3.0%) – See Roy Winstanley: 'Wedlock and "Bastardy" in Woodforde's Parishes' (Journal XII, 1).

and a William, and while the Richmonds had an Anne and a Mary, the Custances had a Mary Anne.

As happened with the two John Reeves and the two Maria Cases, some names were, of course, repeated. That is to say that if an infant died who had been given a name which the family particularly wished to perpetuate, a further child of the same sex might very well be given that same name. This was the case with the only two Anthonys. They were both sons of John and Elizabeth Barker. The first was privately baptised at Weston Parsonage on 10 October 1785. He lived for just two weeks before being buried on 23 October. A year later Elizabeth gave birth to another son who was christened William but three years almost to the day after the birth of the first Anthony, Elizabeth had a third son who was again taken to Weston Parsonage to be baptised and given the name Anthony. Similarly, the Custances had two Nevilles. The first was "always very ill". Woodforde noted in the diary and when, after 12 weeks, he died in October 1788, the little boy was buried next to his brother Edward and sister Mary Anne, the prematurely born child of whom Woodforde said she was "the smallest infant I think I ever had in my arms". By contrast, the Custances' next son born in 1790, also christened Neville, did not die until 1880. Although "a pretty Babe" at three days old when Woodforde went to Weston House to baptise him, by the time he was eight "Neville Custance is a very chuff Boy indeed as I ever saw & cross with every thing – would not eat a bit of Cake when brought to him."

It was, of course, an age in which infant mortality was still high. While 311 children were baptised at Weston between 1777 and 1802, 33 were buried there before reaching their fifth birthday, as were a further 9 infants who had been baptised elsewhere. Many babies died within a few weeks of birth, and when recording in his diary the baptism of a child Woodforde from time to time anticipates the consequences of rudimentary post-natal care with notes such as – "Poor infant looked as if it would not live long" and "They are afraid the poor infant cannot live." If a child died who had not been publicly baptised, Woodforde proved to be unbending in his application of the prescribed form:

I buried a Child this Afternoon of M<sup>r</sup>. Dades by name Henrietta an Infant, and whom I privately baptised Nov: 25 – 1776 –  
I did not have it carried into Church as it was never publicly presented.

(15/4/1777)

Mr Dade does not appear to have been personally offended as he is later to be found making gifts to the Rector of “a fine Hare” and “a fine large Cucumber” but neither does he appear to have learnt his lesson for his daughter Sophia was five before she was “publicly presented” at Weston church.

Another family to have two children of the same name was that of the rather belligerent farmer Joseph Forster. On 18 January 1781 Woodforde tells us that he:

Took a Walk to Mr Forsters and Privately named a Child this Afternoon by name Thomas Herring ...

A month later:

Feb: 18 –... I read Prayers, Preached, read a Proclamation for a Fast on Wednesday and churched Forsters Wife this morning at Weston Church ...

But, sadly, in the autumn of that year we read:

Oct: 18 – Mr Forster of this Parish lost a little Boy this morning – I privately named it in January last – It was never brought to Church to be presented – I am sorry for it – A great negligence in the Parents of it, I think –

Strictly speaking, private baptism was reserved, for those circumstances in which it was thought unlikely that the infant would survive long enough to be taken to church and publicly baptised and there are many cases in the diary of children who had been privately baptised dying before they could be presented at church. The Book of Common Prayer makes clear the parents’ duty in the case of private baptism:

And let them not doubt, but that the Child so baptized is lawfully and sufficiently baptized, and ought not to be baptized again. Yet nevertheless, if the Child, which is after this sort baptized, do afterward live, it is expedient that it be brought into the Church, to the intent that, if the Minister of the same Parish did himself baptize that Child, the Congregation may be certified of the true Form of Baptism, by him privately before used:

Woodforde clearly thought that young Thomas, who lived to be 9 months old, ought, at some time in his short life, to have been taken to Weston Church. The following year Joseph’s wife Anne gave birth to another boy who was also give the names Thomas Herring, the Forsters being related to the well-connected Herring family of Ringland.

It was because he was a stickler for correct procedures that Woodforde was so discomfited on the occasion when he was asked to publicly baptise young Nathaniel Micklethwaite in the child's own home:

... At 2. o'clock took a Walk to M<sup>r</sup>. Micklethwaites and there dined, spent the afternoon, supped & spent the Evening with him, his Wife, his Father and Mother, old M<sup>rs</sup>. Branthwaite, Captain Mickle=  
=thwaite and Wife, M<sup>r</sup>. Jonathan Micklethwaite, and my Niece – About 5. o'clock we dined – before Dinner I publickly baptized their little Boy at home, which I did not much like, but could not tell how to refuse – He was privately named before at Norwich I believe – His Name is Nathaniel ...

(22/9/1784)

The fact that “Old M<sup>r</sup>. and M<sup>rs</sup>. Micklethwaite and his Son the Captain” were the “strangest kind of People I almost ever saw” only helped to make it “an odd disagreeable kind of Day”. albeit that the diarist and Nancy “laughed much when we got home”.

Public baptism usually took place, as the Book of Common Prayer suggests that it should, before the congregation of the church at Sunday service. The formula which Woodforde used to record these events in the diary was: “I read prayers, preached and christened a child this afternoon at Weston”. Woodforde does, however, appear to have had a more relaxed attitude towards this admonition as he occasionally arranged for public baptism to take place in the church on days other than Sunday. This had also been the practice in Somerset where he quite frequently conducted christenings on a weekday. Similarly, the “grand Christening” of Frank Woodforde's daughter, Frances Sophia, in July 1777 to which James and his allies were pointedly not invited, took place on a Wednesday. It tended, of course, only to be those who were self-employed who could arrange their affairs so as to have their children baptised in mid-week.

There is plenty of evidence that the pluralist Dr Ridley, Woodforde's immediate predecessor as Rector of Weston Longville, had been less than thoroughly conscientious in the exercise of his cure. Collective baptisms, in which several brothers and sisters were baptised on the same day, are characteristic of the arrival of a more zealous incumbent and Woodforde conducted a number of such baptisms in his first year at Weston. As early as

4 July 1776 he records having “publicly baptised four children of M<sup>r</sup>. Dade’s”, who – as we have already seen – was not the most diligent of parents in this matter, but it is rather later in the year that the new broom is busiest:

I read Prayers, Preached, churched a woman and christned two Children by Name Christopher and John this afternoon at Weston Church – a large Congregation at Church, M<sup>r</sup>. and M<sup>rs</sup>. Carr there – all People well pleased with the Alterations at the Church – This afternoon was the first time of my using the reading Desk and Pulpit, since its being removed, and also of a new Common Prayer Book in my Desk – I can be heard much better than where it was & easier.

(10/11/1776)

What the Prayer Book calls the “accustomed Offering” for the churching of women was 6d in Woodforde’s time. One of the diarist’s small acts of charity was to return this fee to such impoverished mothers as Anne Gooch (18/10/1778) and Elizabeth Spragg (23/10/1791). There was no charge for baptism until the North-Fox coalition government introduced a stamp duty on the registration of burials, marriages, births and christenings in order to raise money to fight the war in America. A charge of 3d was made for each entry in the parish register. Woodforde records the first levying of the duty in Weston:

I rode down to M<sup>r</sup>. Howletts this morning and christned a Child of his, born last Night, by name William – and it being the first Child that I have christned since the Act took place concerning the Duty to be raised on Christnings – Burials & Marriages, and therefore rec<sup>d</sup>. the Duty of 0 : 0 : 3  
(6/10/1783)

The Act was abolished in 1794 on the grounds that it had “an injurious operation as regards the morals of the people”. There is no evidence to support this suggestion at Weston where during the 5 complete years prior to abolition (1789-93) there were 18 marriages and 73 baptisms, whereas in the 5 subsequent years (1795-99) the number of marriages declined to 13 and of baptisms to 60.

Baptisms were of course, often an excuse for alcoholic excess. One of Brother John’s least distinguished appearances in the diary was the occasion when he “being merry disturbed the whole Company” on the evening of the “grand Christening” at Frank Woodforde’s,

“so much that they were obliged to break up about 11. o’clock”. He had been on the point of coming to blows with James Clarke. His brother was clearly mortified. Another occasion on which the baby’s head had been more than adequately wetted occurred in the summer of 1801:

M<sup>rs</sup>. Custance with Lady Bacon made us a morning Visit, they came walking – and were much frightened by a cow, coming across the Field – They appeared much agitated, they had each a glass of Port Wine and other refreshment – They came about 2. o’clock and stayed till 3. as they stayed till we could send to Weston House after the coach – Briton went to order it directly. It came in about an Hour after it was ordered. – They were pretty well composed when they went.

M<sup>r</sup>. Maynard dined & spent the afternoon with us – M<sup>rs</sup>. Custance and Lady Bacon met him as they came near my House and he appeared to them disguised in Liquor, which I heard afterwards was the Case – he having been to M<sup>r</sup>. Mann’s to name a child – They perhaps urging him to drink –

... M<sup>r</sup>. Maynard left us about 7. this Evening – and perfectly sober & well – I would not by no means push the Glass on fast as I was uneasy about his drinking too much this Morn’ at Manns he having been there to name Mann’s child –

(14/7/1801)

Woodforde did not always suffer children gladly. We remember that he clearly found the stay of Mrs Jeans and her young family at Weston Parsonage a trying experience. He does, however, appear to have enjoyed entertaining the older Custance children either by taking them fishing or sailing the ship Anna on “my Bason”. Likewise, his Valentine gifts, the concern he shows for children with smallpox and the distress he experiences when a child is tragically killed, reveal a tenderness which affects us. In the mind’s eye we see Weston Church with James Woodforde standing over the font perched on its marble pillars, a tiny child in his arms, surrounded by proud parents, smiling gossips and a crowded congregation “... I baptise thee in the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

## CASTLE CARY AND ITS PEOPLE

The first fifteen years of the diary were written by Parson Woodforde when his home was at Ansford, next to the town of Castle Cary in Somerset. It was a very small town with a population of about 1000 and a close knit society of educated people who were close acquaintances of Parson Woodforde, and so he had a very different lifestyle from that in rural Norfolk where his nearest friends were some miles away.

Although it was a separate parish, the small village of Ansford was only about half a mile from the centre of Castle Cary where most of Woodforde's friends lived. He spent much time visiting the homes of his friends; scarcely a day passed without someone calling at the Parsonage. At this time he was a young man, in his twenties and early thirties, and he enjoyed the many social activities in the town, including dancing at parties and balls until the early morning. This was quite natural behaviour for a young parson in the eighteenth century.

Woodforde seems to have been on friendly terms with all his acquaintances and he had known them since he was a boy. Most of them also had a keen interest in the church and they were actively involved, serving their turn as churchwardens and overseers and attending the vestry meetings.

But, although Woodforde reports all his meetings with other people, so many names are mentioned in the diary that it is not easy to relate to them. If we knew more about his acquaintances it would add much to the interest of the diary and, fortunately, we do have several Journal articles about some of them such as nephews Bill and Sam, brothers Heighes and John, and Justice Creed. Now, by bringing together relevant information in the diary and notes in the Society's editions, some background notes have been written about other friends and acquaintances of Woodforde who lived at Castle Cary.

It would also be nice to know more about the topography of the town so that we could visualize where the Parson was going in his various visits; unfortunately, there are only a few clues in the diary and there is little information about Castle Cary in other published sources such as the history books by Collinson (1791) and by Phelps (1831). However, there are some useful documents such as the *Castle Cary Visitor* magazine, published around the turn of the century, and the churchwardens' accounts (unfortunately vestry

minutes do not exist). These church records show how the populace changed and give some indication of their relative wealth by the taxes they paid on the buildings and lands which they occupied. The records also show the wide variety of payments, some of which are very unusual. Apart from the maintenance of the church and its surroundings, including some of the roads, money is paid to individuals for catching small birds, hedgehogs, polecats and foxes; money is also given to passing poor travellers and soldiers.

### *The Town of Castle Cary*

Collinson tells us that there were three streets in the town, one of which was nearly a mile long. This must be the main street which still exists and runs straight through the town from north to south. The church records indicate that this was known as Cary Street in the eighteenth century; it is now called North Street at the top end, it then becomes High Street down to the town centre, after which it is called Fore Street; the road then continues to run past the church into what was called South Cary or South Town, passing the house which was occupied by Justice Creed, still standing today much as it did in Woodforde's time. One of the other two streets mentioned by Collinson is Woodcock Street which has retained the same name from Woodforde's time; this street branches off from the High Street at the town centre. There is also a short street running north from the town centre called Florida Street but it is not known whether this was Collinson's third street.

According to Collinson there were 146 houses in Castle Cary in 1791 with an estimated population of 950. He states that the main industry of the town was in textiles – in making cloth – and that many of the poor were employed in knitting stockings. Phelps tells us that the population had grown to 1281 by the early part of the nineteenth century. In contrast, the much smaller village of Ansford had only about 30 houses in the eighteenth century.

The churchwardens' accounts give the names of householders from 1628 and this indicates how the population changed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is perhaps surprising that the number of ratepayers did not increase markedly during this period, although many names have changed. There were about 80 to 100 ratepayers during the hundred years from around 1660, the time of the Restoration when John Creed, the grandfather of Justice Creed, became the vicar. The lack of much growth in the population

would have been largely caused by the high rate of infant mortality and, possibly, by the stability of the town's small industry.

Fortunately, the centre of the town still has much old world charm for the visitor, standing today in the High Street outside the old George Inn, still thatched now as it was then. We can also see a few houses, often referred to in the diary, which still stand now much as they did in Woodforde's time – those of the Melliar and the Creeds in Cary and, at Ansford, Woodforde's Parsonage and Ansford Lodge, the home of the Parson's Uncle White. Some years ago, members visited the Old Parsonage and, more recently, at the 1993 Frolic, they were able to visit a beautiful Georgian house situated in the Upper High Street about 100 yards north of the Town Hall; this is the house in which Nancy Woodforde spent her later years, from about 1805 until her death in 1830. Nancy was actually a lodger in the house which belonged to her old friend, Martha (Patty) Jeanes, who had first married the Parson's cousin Richard Clarke. This house may well be the one described in the diary on 20 July 1775 when it was being built:

... I dined, spent the aft: & supped &c. at Mr. Richard  
Clarks who is got into a new house at Cary &  
a pretty Box it is indeed, but not quite finished –

Perhaps many other dwellings visited by Woodforde, such as those of the Pews, Burges and Pennys, still stand today but have not (yet) been identified.

### *The Principal Citizens of Castle Cary*

All the people described below were acquaintances of Woodforde but a brief summary only is given of the Creed and Melliar families as they have been fully described in past Journals. Justice Creed and Mr Melliar dominated the other citizens and many belonged to either the Creed or Melliar faction; this division is clearly apparent in the diary which shows that people in one group rarely met socially with those in the other. The effect of this rift was to split the town down the middle on some issues, and it sometimes upset Parson Woodforde, who tried to be neutral. For example, on 3 August 1769:

... went with him [Justice Creed] and his father to the Parish  
vestry held  
at the George Inn, to pass the Church Wardens Accounts –  
There was nothing but Contradiction & Opposition –

*Creed.* Most members will know of the autocrat, Justice Creed, and his father "old M<sup>r</sup>. Creed" from the article in the Winter Journal 1995. Their house, which is shown on the front cover of that Journal, appears today just as it did in Woodforde's time. It is a fairly large house of classical Georgian design situated on the southern outskirts of the town a few hundred yards from the church. Creed had had a remarkable career; his first work as an artist (etcher) has earned him a place in the Dictionary of National Biography. He then became a government official and secretary to Earl Poulett, and he retained close connections with that family who lived some twenty miles away. Although born in Castle Cary, Creed did not return to live there with his father until he retired around 1766 and the diary describes his close friendship with Woodforde over the next eight years until he died early in 1775.

*Melliars.* This family has also been fully described in early Journals (Vols. IX, 3 and XIV, 2). Mr William Melliars had been living in Castle Cary since about 1745 when he was 25. His house, called South Cottage, still stands much as it did in Woodforde's time, just above the church, although the frontage has been somewhat altered. Despite its name, it is a large house and, due to the kindness of its present owners, Mr and Mrs Matthews, members have been able to view the house during some of the recent Somerset Frolics. William Melliars practised as an attorney and, through the marriage to his second wife, he was connected with the family of the earl of Ilchester who had estates in the neighbourhood.

Woodforde was a frequent visitor to the Melliars before he became friendly with Justice Creed. However, after the row about the church gallery when there was bad feeling between Creed and Melliars, Woodforde did not see much of the Melliars family. The relationship cooled even further when Melliars actually assisted Uncle Tom in the scheme to prevent Woodforde from retaining the living of Ansford.

#### *Other Families of Castle Cary*

Next to the Creeds and Melliars in social status were the Burge, Penny and Pew families, apart from the Parson himself and his relations, most of whom lived at Ansford. An indication of the most prominent citizens in Cary is given in the church accounts of 1760. This gives the subscribers for casting the five bells; they were Melliars, Creed, Maby, Penny, William Burge senior and William

(Painter) Clarke – each gave one guinea. Although Woodforde does not indicate where all his friends lived in the town, he does mention South Cary or South Town when he visits a person who lives in that part of the town beyond the church.

### *The Burge Families*

There were two Burge families who were prominent citizens throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although both families were friendly with Woodforde, they were not on very good terms with one another and they hardly ever appear together in the diary. During the period of the diary, one family comprised two brothers, Thomas Austen Burge and Seth Burge, their father Seth Burge having died in 1752. The head of the other Burge family was “old William Burge” who, together with his wife and four sons and one daughter, appear very often in the diary. It is believed that Seth senior and “old William” were brothers. These two families may also have been distantly related to a much poorer Burge family living at Ansford but there was certainly no contact with them.

*Seth and Thomas Austen Burge.* The Will of their father Seth senior is in the Public Records Office and this indicates that he owned substantial property and land in Cary. He left the bulk of his estate in trust to his younger son, Seth, who was only twelve years old at that time, while Thomas gained nothing from the Will unless he survived his brother and his offspring. But, at this time, Thomas was probably just old enough to have already taken over the family business from his father and so it is unlikely that he had been disinherited. The trustees were the two brothers of Seth senior, James Burge of Castle Cary and John Burge, Gent., of Bath.

Both Thomas and his brother belonged to the Melliar faction and after the row about the church gallery they and Woodforde met less often. The brothers seem to have had a close relationship and some common business interests. They were among the first of Woodforde’s acquaintances to appear in the diary when in September 1759 “Mr. Thomas Burge & his Wife, together with his Brother Seth, came over to our House this Afternoon & drank tea with us”. Thomas’s second name of Austen was probably adopted from his mother’s name which was that of one of the oldest families in the town: Austen appears in the church accounts early in the seventeenth century. However, the Burge family was also long-standing and a Thomas Burge is listed in the accounts for 1684.

Although Parson Woodforde refers to Thomas as an old schoolmate, most likely at one of the two local schools he attended before going on to Urchfont, he must have been somewhat older as he was already a married man when Woodforde was only 19. Thomas lived in South Cary, probably somewhere near the church and the house of the Melliar. The diarist writes on 28 December 1768: "As I came from M<sup>r</sup>. Burges I called on M<sup>r</sup>. Melliar &c.". It would have been quite a large house as eighteen people sat down to dinner on 1 January 1766 to celebrate the christening that day of his daughter Ann.

Thomas and his brother seem to have been in business as clothing manufacturers or traders and as farmers. The diary refers to Thomas as selling both straw and stockings to Woodforde. After Mr Wickham took over the vicarage of Cary, the two brothers enquired about taking over the tithe and Wickham offered to let it to them for three years for £130 per annum. It is not known whether the offer was accepted.

Thomas seems to have lived a rather quiet life as he is rarely mentioned among those attending dinners and parties. He was a churchwarden on at least two occasions in 1771 and 1781, and his charitable nature is revealed on 9 February 1773 when Woodforde reported that his nephew Richard Clarke and Thomas Burge "supped & spent the Evening with us – they have been about all day collecting mony for the Poor of Castle Cary these hard times & being unable to work for the severe Frost – I gave to them for the poor, myself – 0: 10: 6."

The first wife of Thomas died in November 1776 and he then remarried a Mrs Ann Whitehead. He died long before the end of the century as is revealed in a rather amusing reference by Woodforde on 15 February 1801: "I dreamed last night that old M<sup>rs</sup>. Melliar of Castle Cary was married by me to M<sup>r</sup>. Tho<sup>s</sup>. Burge of the same place, & has been dead many years."

The younger brother, Seth, was the same age as Woodforde and, in addition to his inheritance, he seems to have made an advantageous marriage into another old established family. Around 1762 he married Ann Russ, sister of Andrew Russ of Clanville, a hamlet which is reached by following the South Cary road out of the town. Seth probably had a substantial house in Castle Cary and Woodforde attended a supper there with twelve people on 7 December 1768. His high status in the town was also reflected by his purchasing a pew for two guineas in 1763, soon after his

marriage. He was one of the two churchwardens in 1769 threatened with prosecution by Justice Creed during the dispute about the church choir.

He had two sons who were written about in the *Castle Cary Visitor* in October 1899 showing that they had very substantial property and land holdings around 1820. The following report was given on one of the brothers: "No man was better known in his day than John Burge and when he died at the age of 58 in July 1835 a big gap was made in the social life of our town."

*William Burge.* Members of his family mixed with Woodforde much more than their namesakes, partly as a result of their close friendship with Justice Creed. William Burge, senior, or "old M<sup>r</sup>. Burge", as Woodforde called him, was probably the wealthiest business man in Castle Cary. He was a cloth and stocking manufacturer and employed many of the poorer people in the town, much of the work being done by outworkers in their own homes.

This Burge was born in 1706 and after his first wife died in 1763 he remarried early in 1765 when Woodforde reports that he took his new wife to Sherborne for their honeymoon. As a leading citizen and close friend of Justice Creed, he acted as an intermediary between Creed and Woodforde when they had their disagreement about the choir singers. His house was probably in the northern or central part of the town as it was not within easy walking distance of Creed's home. The diary mentions on 8 October 1770 that Woodforde was taken in Mr Hindley's chariot to drink tea at old Mr Burge's. He was a strong supporter of Wilkes and, on 18 April 1770, there was much celebration at Cary on the day of Wilkes' "enlargement" (he had been released from prison on the previous day). The church bells rang all day: "M<sup>r</sup>. Burge's house handsome illuminated in the Evening" when Woodforde dined there with many others, mainly those who were friends of Justice Creed.

In 1777, Woodforde visited him while on holiday in Somerset. On 2 July he writes:

... Made old M<sup>r</sup>. Burge a visit this afternoon at Cary –  
Poor old M<sup>r</sup>. Burge is amazingly altered since I saw  
him last year – he is fell away to nothing almost – and  
I think will not hold it very long – he has a Cough also.  
He was exceeding glad to see me at Cary –

A few weeks later, on 25 August, Woodforde again visited old Mr

Burge “who looks very bad – Mr. Burge is in tolerable spirits but cannot hold it long.” He died in the following year.

Mr Burge’s Will is held in the Public Records Office. It was written in 1774, and is a good example of the great care which was often applied to writing a Will where the testator had considerable property to bequeath. His eldest son William received just £1000 but he would have been well established in his own business. The father’s main house was left to his second son John together with “his Close called Whitesclose”. John also received £1000 and two other properties; one in Castle Cary, “recently erected called or named by the sign of the Catherine Wheel”; this new building must have become an inn shortly afterwards according to the list of inns given in the *Castle Cary Visitor* of September 1904 which also states that one George White was the landlord in 1785. John was also given another inn at Bruton called the “Cock”.

The youngest son Samuel received £2000 plus an equal share of “all my household goods and furniture and all my utensils and implements in my Stocking Trade”. He and John also gained an equal share of the residue of his estate. However, William’s second wife, Ann, seems to have fared poorly; he gave her just £20 plus his “Messuages or Tenements late Willis’s in Castle Cary” and, as he does not refer to his wife with any term of endearment, perhaps the marital relationship had not been too happy.

Only £50 was given directly to his daughter Sarah, probably because she had some mental incapacity; she was also given £1000 in trust so that she would receive the interest as a small income. Mr Burge also took care in writing a long and complicated statement to ensure that Sarah would be provided for in various circumstances. For example, if any future husband did not settle any of his own money on her then the trustees “should ensure that the interest shall be paid to her for her lifetime for her sole and separate use independent and apart from any such husband who is not to intermeddle or have anything to do therewith but her receipts to be from time to time sufficient discharges for the same.”

Apart from the several properties mentioned, he had left a total of £5000 to his children which would be equivalent to about three or four hundred thousand pounds today. Mr Burge was clearly quite wealthy. The younger sons John and Samuel were appointed joint executors of the Will.

*William Burge, Junior.* The eldest son, William, was six years older than Woodforde and lived with his wife in Castle Cary in his own house which the diarist visited many times. William had married Jenny Adams before 1760 but there is no record of any children. He was also a cloth and stocking manufacturer, probably in a collaborative business with his father. He performed a valuable service to Woodforde when the chimney in Ansford Parsonage caught fire in March 1776 and William sent all his men to help put it out, but refused to allow them to accept any reward. At some time in the next year or two he moved away from Cary to a place called Barton Farm, about one mile outside Winchester, where he was visited by Woodforde on 10 September 1779 while the Parson was on his way back to Norfolk. This meeting also reveals that a major rift had developed between the Burge and Pew families:

I stayed with him about an Hour – I also paid  
him my Moiety of a Bill, concerning a Law Suit  
that was to have been carried on against Pew  
& Tidcomb for withholding a Legacy given to the  
Poor of Cary, Ansford & Lovington by old M<sup>r</sup>. Creed.  
My Moiety amounted to the sum of – 1: 16: 6  
M<sup>r</sup>. Hindley, M<sup>r</sup>. Burges Father, himself and me concerned  
I did not much like to part with my Mony, but I promised.

It seems that by this time the legacy had been paid, albeit belatedly, but perhaps this had only occurred after the threat of the above legal action. But Mr Pew's contribution to the legacy would have ceased soon afterwards as within a few years he sold his share of the Creed estate. (For more information about this legacy see my article on Justice Creed in the Journal for Winter 1995.) It is unlikely that Woodforde saw William Burge again after this meeting as he died in 1796.

*John Burge.* The second son, John, was six years younger than Woodforde and he lived with his parents during the years of the Somerset diaries while working in his father's business. He was a contemporary and bachelor friend of James Clarke and Andrew Russ and they all went on a jaunt to London in May 1769 after winning a prize of £50 in the Lottery. After he inherited part of his father's business in 1778 he became a very responsible citizen, being churchwarden no less than five times between 1781 and 1800 and then continually until 1805. He married some time before 1778 and his wife's maiden name was Millward.

During Woodforde's later visits to Somerset after 1780, John Burge appears to have been one of the few of his old acquaintances who met Woodforde on each of his visits, and on 3 October 1793 he dined with John and his wife. Unfortunately John's stocking business failed and he became bankrupt in 1809, dying soon afterwards in 1810.

John had a daughter, Eliza, who dined with Woodforde at Cole during his last visit to Somerset in 1795. Woodforde may also have met the son, William, who would have been a young boy of 10 at that time and who achieved considerable distinction in his adult life. He appears as a Somerset notable in the book, *Somerset Parishes* by A. L. Humphries (1906). He gained his BA at Oxford University (Wadham College) in 1806 when he was aged only 20 and became a DCL in 1834. After his death, his biography appeared in the *Illustrated London News* for 24 November 1849. He became a successful lawyer with an extensive practice in Colonial and Foreign Law. He was made a QC and a Bencher of the Inner Court and was also MP for Rye for a short time in 1831, having previously been Attorney General for Jamaica and a Commissioner of Bankruptcy. He was also the author of some legal works and his work on Colonial Law in 4 volumes published in 1838 was still in print in 1899.

*James Burge.* Little is known about the third son, James, who died in April 1767 when only twenty years old. His illness is fully described in the diary when Woodforde visited him several times and said "he was a very good sort of a young man & much respected – It was the evil which was stopped and then fell upon his lungs".

*Samuel Burge.* The fourth son, Samuel, was born in 1750 and he also lived with his father during Woodforde's time in Somerset. He does not appear much in the diary when Woodforde was living in Somerset but, later, on a holiday visit in 1777, Woodforde bought a parcel of stockings from Sam on 25 July and the next day made a present of some of them to his brother-in-law Mr Pounsett. Around this time, Sam married Melleora, the elder daughter of the shopkeeper, Mr Francis, but she died in November 1786 after giving birth to her child who also died. Soon after, Sam was courting Patty, the widow of Richard Clarke, and Woodforde wrote in Norfolk on 13 October 1787: "M<sup>rs</sup>. R. Clarke is not married yet to Sam Burge, but expected to take place soon". However, this wedding did not occur and Patty married Mr John Jeanes of the nearby town, Ditchat, in 1798; an event much decried by

Woodforde as he thought him "too old and ordinary". Sam married his second wife, Anne, and they were still living at Cary in 1814 when they sold some land.

*Sally Burge.* The only daughter, Sally or Sarah, was born in 1742. She was a frequent visitor to the Parsonage and, in July 1770, Woodforde writes: "Poor Sally Burge is at Oldstock Madhouse being but very bad in her mind". However, she must have recovered within the next year as she visited the Parsonage on 25 June 1771 with her father and, after her father's death, she had tea with Woodforde in June 1779. She died unmarried in 1798 aged 56.

### *The Penny Family*

Some of this information is taken from a note on the Penny family published in the *Castle Cary Visitor* for November 1905. The father, Robert Penny, does not appear much in the diary as he died in 1766 when Woodforde was only 26. He came from an old Cary family who had lived at Clanville; Robert and his family lived at South Cary and he was in business as a maltster. He was probably a close friend of Woodforde's parents as he was a pall bearer at the funeral of Woodforde's mother in February 1766 only two months before he himself died. He had been baptized at Castle Cary in 1695 and married Sarah Barret of Milborne Port, near Sherborne, in 1727. They had four sons and one daughter who does not seem to be mentioned in the diary. Mr Penny was a churchwarden in 1732 and again in 1755, and paid a church rate in 1758 of 6s. 8d, one of the highest payments, signifying that he had substantial property. In 1761 the church record states that Mr Penny was paid for repairing the road to Clanville but this may have been his son, John, who was living at Clanville at that time. After Mr Penny died, Woodforde kept in close touch with his widow, "old M<sup>rs</sup>. Penny", who long outlived her husband and died in 1782.

*Robert Penny.* He was the eldest son and was some eight years older than Woodforde. He was a fellow clergyman who had also graduated BA at Oriel College, Oxford, in 1755 and became an MA and Fellow in 1757. His career was fully described in an early *Journal*, Spring 1972. As Woodforde was also at Oriel during his first year at Oxford in 1758/9, Penny probably took the younger man under his wing and they were often in one another's company. By 1759 he had begun to assist Woodforde's father as a curate for Castle Cary, and around 1761 he was appointed full-time curate

which continued until 1765. At that time Penny obtained a living at the nearby village of Evercreech, which he held for a minor, "Young Master Rodbard". Three years later, he moved up into high society when he became domestic chaplain to the duke of Beaufort and, later, he gained several livings as an absentee parson. After this time Woodforde saw him rarely and they did not keep up their friendship. Penny died at the duke of Beaufort's estate at Badminton in 1809.

*John Penny.* He was born in 1734, married in 1761, and lived in the outlying hamlet of Clanville, and it was at their house that Woodforde drank "Cockagee Cyder" on the day George III was married on 9 September 1761. John's wife (Alice Stroud) died in 1771 at the early age of 32 – "it is said that she hurt herself greatly by drinking" – and John himself died a few years later in 1779, leaving an orphan daughter Mary who died two years later aged only 18.

*Caleb Penny.* Of the other children, only Caleb is much mentioned; he was three years older than Woodforde and, like his father, was in business as a maltster and hop-dealer. He appears to have continued to live at South Cary with his mother after his father died in 1766. He married some time before 1772; his wife's maiden name was Bryant and Woodforde went to their house on 21 September 1772 and baptised their child, Robert. Caleb also died quite young in 1783 when aged 45, but his wife lived to the age of 80 and died in 1825.

Frances, the Pennys' daughter, married a Mr Greenwood and their son was Robert Penny Greenwood who lived at "Ansford House" and died there in 1849 aged 57. This may have been the Lower House which was Woodforde's home until he moved into the Parsonage.

### *The Pew Family*

Mr Pew was often mentioned in the diary as the carrier who transported goods to and from Castle Cary and he also owned a flour mill. As described in the notes to Volume 1 of the Society's edition of the diary, he appears to be an example of a real entrepreneurial business man rather than simply a merchant, although all his ventures seem to have failed. He was not of an old Cary family and from the church accounts he seems to have moved to the town around 1745 when he soon became a prominent citizen.

He was a close friend of the Creeds and, as one of the two main beneficiaries of the Will of old Mr Creed, he received half of the substantial Creed estate. However, this bequest was insufficient to save his ailing business and he became bankrupt and died in Ilchester Prison in 1782. Woodforde wrote on 27 March 1784:

... he had been like a hunted Hare for many Years before. His eldest Son Will<sup>m</sup>. is since conveyed to the same Jail – & I believe he deserves it Hope the poor father is now happy – His Family gave him much uneasiness –

Pew had a large family of ten children, six of whom were present at the large party at his house on 6 January 1772 which was attended by Woodforde and about twenty other guests. "We had dancing and very good Musick – I danced 2. Minuets –". The older son William was one of the leading men in the church choir which caused so much trouble. The younger son Richard seems to have been the shining light of the family, and he became a successful physician and scientist, concerned in a number of schemes for coal mining in Somerset.

*(Painter) William Clarke*

He was an interesting character, much mentioned in the diary. He was so called because one of his many occupations was as a painter; he painted the Woodforde chaise in June 1762. He was an undertaker, house builder, furniture maker and general handyman. He also sold many household articles and was an auctioneer and tax collector. Despite his frequent appearances as a trademan he was regarded as one of the principal citizens and he and his family were present at many of the main social events in the town. He built a new house for letting in 1771 and Woodforde enquired about it on 6 March when he thought he might need to find a new home in the town.

Painter Clarke was the only person outside the Woodforde family who helped in the survey and allotment of the property left by Woodforde's mother. He was also a close and longstanding friend of Mr Melliar and in 1772 was one of two executors of his Will, in which he was left Melliar's silver watch, with a request that he should wear it every day. His high status in the town was shown in 1779 when he was listed as one of the two Stewards of the Manor

of Castle Cary along with Uncle Tom in signing the agreement to build the Round House as a temporary prison. He was married and had a son, Charles, and three daughters. He died in May 1791.

### *Maby*

David Maby was parish clerk of both Castle Cary and Ansford in succession to John Coleman in 1766 and he was also the tax collector. His father, "old Mr. Maby", was one of the seven principal subscribers towards the cost of casting the church bells in 1760. David Maby appears very often in the diary, usually on his frequent visits to the Parsonage for dealing with parish business. He was also churchwarden in 1769, the year of the great quarrel about the church gallery. He had a brother, Edward, who sometimes deputized for David as the clerk at church services. There was also a sister, Jenny, who used to be Nancy's old school mistress. Nancy and Woodforde met Jenny Maby on 26 August 1795 during his last visit to Somerset and at that time she was living at South Cary and appeared to be still unmarried. During this visit, Woodforde also met David Maby at his "grand new house" which Woodforde had reported as being built in 1791. On 19 August he wrote: "In the afternoon I walked with my brother down to David Maby's and smoked a pipe with him. He gave us strong Beer & Cider, no Wine". At this time Maby had probably retired from his parish offices and he died a few years later in 1798.

### *The Russ Family*

Many members of this family appear in the earliest church accounts and their ancestors can be traced back to 1535 when some land was leased to Henry Russe. As many as twenty different churchwardens named Russ held office between the years 1572 and 1876, although the family was much reduced in Woodforde's time and the following two descendants are the only ones to appear much in the diary.

*Mrs Joan Russ.* By the time she appears in the diary she was an elderly widow living at Dimmer, a hamlet about a mile from Cary church. She was probably a close friend of Woodforde's parents and was then a fairly frequent visitor to the Parsonage. Woodforde liked the old lady and often went out of his way to visit her during his holiday visits to Somerset in the 1770s. He last saw her on 29 August 1779 when he wrote: "took a walk to Dimmer and drank

tea with old M<sup>rs</sup>. Joany Russ, 92 years old – she was very hearty but very deaf and almost dark” (presumably nearly blind). She died soon after, around the end of 1779, and Woodforde commented: “she was a good Woman and I hope now happy”.

*Andrew Russ.* He was a close friend of Woodforde’s brother John and during the earlier years of the diary they, and one or two others such as the Clarke brothers, are often mentioned as eating and drinking together as the lively bachelors of the town. However, his friendship with John must have been severely strained when he married Nancy Wason on 13 September 1773. Nancy had been John’s girl friend until May in the previous year when she ended their relationship, much to the concern of Parson Woodforde as well as to John. After the marriage, they lived at Andrew’s house at Clanville, a small village less than a mile from Ansford. Thereafter, Andrew Russ does not appear much in the diary although Woodforde met Andrew’s son and daughter while visiting Somerset in 1795 and reported that the son, Edward, was apprenticed to Woodforde’s cousin, the medical doctor Tom Woodforde, at Taunton.

### *The Francis Family*

*Joseph Francis.* Known as “old M<sup>r</sup>. Francis”, he was the main shopkeeper at Cary and appears very often in the diary as Woodforde bought most of his day-to-day provisions from him. He sold a wide variety of goods and Woodforde mentions that he bought coffee, tea, tobacco, sugar (a 20lb loaf) and such diverse items as silk handkerchiefs, cloth for making clothes and household materials such as nails and laths. Francis also hired out horses, acted as the town’s main undertaker and was the local banker, cashing many banknotes for Woodforde. He had quite a high status in the town and was a particular friend of the Melliaris to whom he became related by his son’s marriage. Joseph died in February 1793 and when Woodforde visited Somerset in 1795 it appears that the business had been taken over by John Francis, presumably one of the sons. It is believed that Joseph had five children and of these the following are mentioned in the diary.

*Thomas Francis.* He was married to Sally Cheeke by Woodforde on 17 February 1767. She was a cousin of Joanna Cheeke who became the second wife of William Melliar. Sally had come to live at Cary with her Aunt Agnes Cheeke in 1763. Woodforde, together

with Mr and Mrs Melliar, visited the newly married couple a few days after their wedding at their house in Castle Cary. Sadly, the marriage lasted a very short time as Thomas died nine months later. The diary reports on 23 October:

Young M<sup>r</sup>. Tho<sup>s</sup>. Francis died this morning in the Fever –  
He has had the Fever most violently – quite Frantick –  
From the Fever good Lord deliver us, if it be thy Good Will

*Joseph Francis.* Just two years later, the widow married again, on 21 October 1769, a relative of her past husband, a Joseph Francis of Yeovil. The married couple then settled in Castle Cary, probably in Sally's former house. But within a few years Sally was widowed for the second time when Joseph Francis died on 2 December 1774 aged only 25. As Woodforde was away at Oxford at the time and as old Mr Francis also had a son named Joseph, it was not clear from this which Joseph had died. However, Joseph, the son of old Mr Francis, appears in the diary on 31 August 1779 and so it must have been Sally's husband who died and left her a widow for the second time. This is confirmed when no further mention of Sally's husband is found although she herself is mentioned twice in the next year, 1775. They had been a very young couple as Sally's second husband was only 20 years old when they married. Sally was probably of similar age and if so she would have been a teenage bride on her first marriage – and would have been widowed twice while only in her mid twenties.

*The Francis Daughters.* Four daughters are mentioned in the diary. Cary, the youngest, died when only 12 years old and Woodforde describes the "very pretty" funeral on 2 August 1771 at which he had a white hatband and white gloves as was the custom. Melliar was the eldest daughter and Woodforde bought some silk handkerchiefs from her on 1 May 1772. Later, as mentioned above, she married Sam Burge but died in childbirth in November 1786 as was reported in a letter to Woodforde by Sister Pounsett. The other Francis daughters, Nancy and Molly, are mentioned occasionally in the diary but very little is known about them.

## BOOK REVIEW

Graham Midgley: *University Life in Eighteenth Century Oxford* (Yale University Press, 1996)

At £16.95 this is a fairly expensive book, containing 43 illustrations but only 182 pages of text. As Hamlet's Mum said to Polonius, more matter and less art would have been a desirability here, although the pictures are well chosen, attractive and delightfully clear. But this remark is not a mere grouse. To wish it had been double the length is the sincerest tribute the reviewer of any book can pay to it. Mr Midgley's volume comes appositely to fill a gap that many readers must have deplored. Books on past times in Oxford have always tended, so far as possible, to avoid the period, or at least to pass over it quickly as a time of dulness and intellectual stagnation. In particular we have lacked a comprehensive account of University life in the century before reformers changed Oxford forever. The chapter allotted to the non-curricular activities of dons and undergraduates in the 5th volume of the *History of Oxford University* is disappointingly thin, and there is virtually nothing else nearer to our time than Sir Edward Godley, who was writing before the first World War. Mr Midgley, who is an Emeritus Fellow of St Edmund Hall, has covered his topic with admirable thoroughness and often brilliance. He is judicious in his balance of the good and bad things, avoiding the exaggerations and half-truths of those who have simply damned eighteenth century Oxford without giving much thought to the validity of their animadversions. It is true that the book is introduced by a derisive quatrain, parodied from Gray's *Elegy*:

Beneath these domes in Gothic grandeur grey  
Where rears that spire its old fantastic crest,  
Snug in their mouldy cells from day to day  
Like bottled wasps the sons of Science rest

But at the same time he makes it clear that intellectual activity was still going on, and that "learned and industrious scholars ... lived and jostled alongside their more idle and sleepy colleagues". In the book, however, he says nothing about academic pursuits at all, concentrating entirely upon the social life of the University. The author draws his information from a great number of contemporary authorities; but members of this Society will in particular be interested and pleased to note that Woodforde is one of the two

most important and frequently used primary sources. The other is Thomas Hearne (1678-1735) whose residence dates from an earlier period, a very different kind of person and one who, unlike Woodforde, spent the whole of his adult life in Oxford, so the two very well complement each other.

Mr Midgley deals with the material in his 11 chapters by subject. The first, 'Hierarchy and Rank: the Social Structure' begins with the college heads, from whose number the supreme head, the Vice Chancellor of the University, was selected (and still is). The author takes in descending order the Noblemen and Gentlemen Commoners, inevitably moneyed and often undisciplined young men, the Commoners, the largest class of undergraduates (the word came from those students who ate their food, or "Commons", in their colleges) and the Servitors. These last were poor students who were granted free accommodation and tuition, and a small money allowance, in return for carrying out various college duties in Hall, and personal attendance on their wealthier fellow-students. That last obligation seems to have been in the process of dying out, for all Mr Midgley's examples of it are taken from the early part of the century. There were no servitors at New College in Woodforde's time and although he must have known students of that class among his familiar acquaintance with young men from other colleges, he never mentions any distinction of the kind. Servitors were abolished altogether in the middle of the next century.

All the various ranks in the University were signaled by their particular style of academic dress which was prescribed by statute and rigidly maintained. Gowns had to be worn in college and on the streets, as the outward and visible symbol of the social hierarchy. It was a very young society. Leaving at 17, those Wykehamists who were "Founder's Kin" at once became full Fellows of New College, and entitled to their part in the annual share out of receipts from college property. The rest had to serve out a probationary time, although this was a pure formality, and the full Fellowship was granted two years to the day after the date of admission.

Whether, at 17+ (some were younger) we consider the University entrants as boys or men is immaterial. They were very much *in statu pupillari*. Attendance in chapel and at dinner in Hall was compulsory. Absenteeism was, up to the time of graduation, considered a very serious offence, and penalized by "gating", often for very long periods. (We may remember Mr Grattan, who was

sentenced to be incarcerated on the college premises for two years.) The undergraduate's allowance, donated by parents, was frequently handed over to his tutor, and by him doled out as required. He could also give, or withhold, permission for the student to be away from his college overnight.

In spite of all this, his arrival was often a source of great happiness at being released from parental or scholastic repression, and master of his own set of rooms, in which he could live as he pleased. A Thomas Frognall Dibden wrote his autobiography published in 1837, vividly remembering his arrival as an undergraduate of St John's forty years before:

But who shall describe the inward glow of delight, with which that same scholar first sees the furniture of his rooms as his own – and his rooms a sort of castle, impervious, if he pleases, to the intruding foot! Everything about him begets a spirit of independence. He reads – he writes – he reposes – he carouses, as that spirit induces. All that he puts his hand upon, is his own ...

These rooms themselves provided the greatest variety in terms of ease and comfort. Edward Gibbon, a Gentleman Commoner at Magdalen, wrote that his “apartment consisted of three elegant and well-furnished rooms in the new building, a stately pile”. Poor students had to put up with much inferior accommodation, tiny and awkwardly situated cells perhaps just beneath the roof:

And up a long staircase with pain did I clamber  
To reach the black door of my desolate chamber.

Few of the colleges were up to their nominal strength in the eighteenth century – Exeter was half empty in 1767 – so it must have been possible for a student to find better accommodation in his college than had been given to him upon entrance. This did not apply at Christ Church, by far the biggest and most popular of the colleges. One man recalled his “eight feet study” there, and said that “this flourishing College was, at least full, if not overflowing ... for the college was so completely cramm'd, that shelving garrets, and even unwholesome cellars, were inhabited by young gentlemen”.

Eating customs are dealt with in two chapters of the book. Dinner was the one formal, hot meal of the day. It tended to be later as the century advanced, moving from the morning to the mid-afternoon, as happened of course elsewhere. For undergraduates dinner in Hall

was compulsory; at least the authorities tried very hard to make it so; and the young men were expected to dress up and have their wigs in good order and well powdered. As to the quality of the food, opinions tended to differ. Woodforde was happy about the food at New College, of which he actually chose the menus in the time he was sub warden. He more than once compares the food at other colleges unfavourably with the standards obtaining at his own. But college food and cooking arrangements had their critics, most strongly voiced by a German visitor, C. J. von Uffenbach, who turned up his nose at Christ Church Hall, writing disdainfully of "the coarse and dirty and loathsome table cloths, square wooden plates and the wooden bowls into which the bones are thrown, this odious custom obtains in all the colleges. I should find it impossible," this fastidious Teuton exclaimed, "to dine and live there". This testimony comes from early in the century, and things may have improved by the diarist's time at Oxford; but wooden platters were a feature of the meals at Winchester.

The eighteenth century was a time of heavy and persistent drinking, common in all ranks and conditions of society. If there was more of it at Oxford than some other places, the reason was that the colleges were full of people who could afford to be toppers, and many of whom had little else to do with their time. In one year at Queen's, Mr Midgley tells us, 1470 bottles of port, 171 bottles of sherry, 48 bottles of madeira, and "uncounted bottles of gin, rum and punch were consumed". The Dons not only failed to show any example of sobriety to the young, but were often seen, as recorded in this book, to reel and stagger about the streets in total inebriety, like the man who was so drunk that he could stand on his feet only by hanging on to the walls of the Radcliffe Camera; as this is a circular building, he kept on going round and round until someone rescued him. Those who were in residence took this sort of thing in their stride, and it was commonly the visitors who noticed them: Dr Thomas Campbell, a friend of Johnson, wrote with some asperity:

N.B. We went to the coffee house in the evening, where almost all Gownsmen we saw were tipsy, and the streets re-echoed with Bacchanalian cries, as we returned from supper. ... The next night also, we went to another coffee house, and there the scene was only shifted, all muzzy. This happily abated my enthusiasm for an Oxford education.

These passed for moderately respectable places; much worse were the taverns and pot-houses of the city. The proprietors of wine-cellar, who considered themselves of a superior class, described "more than 300 Ale-houses of the very worst Fame and Reputation ... " Even below these were the "inns or *tippling houses*," boasting names like "*Fox-hall, Lemon Hall, Feather-hall, Stump-hall, Cabbage-Hall, Caterpillar hall &c.*". Some of these places were located in the suburbs, or "skirts" of the city; the last two on the list were situated near the foot of Headington Hill.

"Drinking" and "Riot" share a chapter of Mr Midgley's book, and indeed the two are closely related. There was indeed a deal of mostly random and unmotivated violence in the society of that time, and this found its occasional path to the lives of even the most peaceful characters. All three of the fist-fights in which the young Woodforde was engaged, and recorded in the diary, took place in Oxford. Sometimes attacks were serious enough to require a proclamation, such as the one issued by the Vice Chancellor in 1750:

Whereas on *Friday* evening ... between the Hours of Eight and Nine o'clock, a most notorious Insult was offer'd to one of the Senior proctors in the Execution of his Office, by a Person throwing at Him a large Stone, whereby he received a violent Blow on the Head; this is therefore to give Notice that if any one will discover the said Person, he shall upon his conviction be entitled to a Reward of ten Guineas.

This was clearly regarded as a serious assault, but in general the college authorities were less inclined to penalize rough, drunken and aggressive behaviour than to prosecute those guilty of unlicensed absence from the college premises.

The University was a male world, in which women had no place and were not allowed to penetrate except as servants. Mr Midgley says that to call this exclusively masculine society celibate is a myth. Of course, he is right, because he is using the word in its now current and accepted meaning, that of a life-style entirely devoid of sexual indulgence. In that sense, celibacy would indeed have been mythical. But to Woodforde's contemporaries the word, from Latin *coelebs*, a bachelor, meant the state of being unmarried. Marriage indeed ran so totally counter to the custom of the colleges and halls that it carried with it an automatic loss of a Fellowship,

without resignation being needed, although we know of a number of cases where secret or, strangely enough, open and obvious marriages managed to exist at the same time as a college Fellowship was held. Some colleges operated a system by which clerical Fellows who had accepted a living and married were allowed a period of several years before their Fellowship had to be given up. Discussing the recent marriage of a Warden of New College, contrary to the Statutes and design of the Founder, the jaundiced Hearne snarled: "These are things that are evaded all over the University, with Shame be it spoken, and Colleges and Halls are turn'd into Cunny-boroughs". But by Woodforde's time, 50 years later, the Wardens were married quite openly.

As might have been predicted of a place with a large number of energetic, under-employed young men, many of them rich enough to buy whatever indulgence they were inclined to, prostitution flourished in spite of the Proctors, whose powers included those of arresting girls and locking them up in the local bridewell. According to Hearne, in one year, six or seven weeks before the annual race meeting held in the Port Meadow, a number of booths were erected. There was a scandal when it was discovered that in one of them three Commoners of Exeter College, "and many besides, to the number of about 30, lay with a young woman all together one night (the Woman's Maiden Name Cradock, she being married, a most impudent Slut) in the said Meadow, whilst all the people in the meadow stood around to see them". The keeper of a brothel in St Giles parish, named William Blake, had the book thrown at him in consequence of a resolution "To prosecute all offenders of this kind in the future with the utmost rigour." He was sentenced to six months imprisonment, after he had stood in the pillory. But the spectators were notably sympathetic. Not only did they refrain from throwing things at him, the common practice when an offender was really unpopular, but (a delightful contemporary touch), because it was raining he was allowed to keep his hat on!

The authorities did what they could. No less a dignitary than the Vice-Chancellor personally "watch'd Mrs Gratiana Crook a black Wench in a Gentleman-Commoner's Chamber in Queens Coll & broke open the Door upon them". The Jacobite Hearne then added with relish: "Memorandum that the said Gratiana Crook is the Daughter of a Presbyterian". As for the offending wench, "black" simply meant that she was dark-haired or of a dark complexion.

Hearne is our authority for a circumstantial tale of immorality in his own Hall: "one Rice (a Batch. of Arts) a welchman of ill Character ... kept in his Room at the Hall all night on Wednesd. Night last a comely [lass] from Begbroke called Huntingdon Peg, & yesterday had her to dinner in his Chamber". A Gentleman Commoner, Walter, joined them. Sam the under butler told the Principal about it and the infuriated Walter attacked Sam in the quad. Later the Principal and his wife came down from their Lodgings in a vain attempt to restore peace. When the Vice-Principal, Mr Creed, joined them Walter threw kitchen plates at his head, and told him to "get back to Queens, where he had been only a poor pitiful servitor". In the midst of the row Huntingdon Peg escaped, before a Proctor could be found to arrest her and lock her up.

Oxford was a High Tory and High Church place; indeed the lunatic fringe of Jacobitism was strongly represented there. Riotous behaviour more than once was sparked off by hostility towards dissenters, and the Hanover dynasty, created by the Whigs, was unpopular. Great joy was publicly expressed at the news that Walpole's detested Excise Bill had been defeated in 1733: "The bells rung from between ten and eleven o'Clock that night, till two or three in the morning at most of the Parish Churches, & there were bonfires also, throwing of Serpents, and other rejoycings in Oxford upon this occasion". As the century advanced fireworks and fire crackers became popular, displacing the older custom of lighting bonfires. A particularly horrible refinement of the already brutal custom of the public execution came about when the parents and friends of the executed criminal were attacked by "Scholars" who wanted the body for dissection, the only kind of body the doctors were legally permitted to get their hands on. Fierce and vicious fights sometimes took place.

I have, I think, described and quoted enough to give a prospective reader a glimpse of the many delights in this book. It is well and attractively written, and brings to life the full energy and colour of a bygone age.

It is also well researched and accurate, and criticism has very little indeed to build on. The author makes remarkably few errors. He should not have said that Woodforde was often present at public executions, because in the whole extent of the diary there is an actual record of his having attended that macabre spectacle only twice. He says that a Junior Common Room did not exist in the Colleges and Halls of the time; but this is disproved by a passage

in Woodforde that actually mentions the JCR at New College, and there are two other and similar references in *Woodforde at Oxford*. It may perhaps be open to the objection that much of the cited source material is taken from satire, and that this is no impartial testimony, since lampooners are less concerned with investigating historical truths than with making points. The index is not very useful, and could with advantage have been made fuller.

But in general it is difficult to speak with less than the warmest praise of this very instructive and most enjoyable book.

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## PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY ANNUAL "FROLIC, BATH, 9-11 MAY 1997

This was the first Frolic to be held in Bath and it proved to be a very rewarding choice. The centre of Bath provides a more complete representation of a large Georgian town than anywhere else in the country; its streets and buildings can be seen much as they were on the many occasions when Woodforde stayed there. But quite apart from the Georgian interest there are also some older places which are treasures for anyone interested in our national history and which make Bath one of the leading tourist centres in the country.

Members arrived at the Stakis Hotel on Friday afternoon. The hotel was well chosen by the organizer, Anne Williams, as it is close to the railway station and, a rare benefit in Bath, it has a large car park which was much appreciated by many of the fifty-five attendees. The hotel was very comfortable and the service excellent; the reception staff were particularly polite and friendly. The setting is also pleasant, alongside the river, where there used to be a wharf for assembling the building material for the city, the Bath stone brought down from the quarries in the overlooking hills.

We gathered before dinner to meet old friends and some new acquaintances for the usual sherry reception. After an excellent meal we moved into the adjoining room for the Annual General Meeting. Although our Editor, Roy Winstanley, was unable to

attend, he had prepared a report which was read by Martin Brayne. Our Chairman, Nigel Custance, paid Roy a special compliment on the continued excellence of our Journals and on the publication of the revised edition of *Ansford II*, copies of which had been brought to the Frolic, hot off the press. Our Treasurer, David Case, arrived in Bath only just in time to present the accounts, having travelled some 400 miles that day to attend the funeral of a close friend. He told us that our financial position had been much improved via better investments and good sales of the Diaries and we now have a substantial cash balance. After re-electing the existing Committee we were then invited to answer a quiz of 26 questions concerning Woodforde's experiences at Bath, the results to be handed in by Sunday morning.

After the meeting, members could view an excellent display of Bath memorabilia and illustrations of many of the places visited by Woodforde during his many visits to Bath and of places to be seen during the tour. There were also bundles of old Journals available for sale at the knock-down price of £1 per bundle.

On Saturday morning, having previously been divided into two groups, we walked the short distance to the railway station to board one of two special buses with open tops. Unfortunately the weather was mixed during most of the day, with heavy showers, and many of those brave enough to climb to the upper deck were forced to raise their umbrellas – a rather incongruous and amusing sight. However, the journey was short, and after less than a mile we arrived at the upper end of the city, close to all the places to be visited during the day.

At the Assembly Rooms we were given an interesting talk on how they were used in their heyday around the end of the eighteenth century. Woodforde was at Bath in January 1771 when he noted that the rooms were being built. There are three rooms: the largest being the splendid ballroom with its gallery for the musicians; this leads into a smaller central room for card playing and this is connected to another beautiful large room for taking refreshments. Although the building was badly damaged in 1942 during the last war, it has been faithfully restored to the beautiful original state.

We were then conducted around the Museum of Costume which is adjacent to the Assembly Rooms. Here we had excellent guides who gave an extremely detailed account of the 18th century costumes. For most of the ladies this tour was the highlight of the Frolic.

The Royal Crescent is an architectural masterpiece and contains thirty grand houses in a splendid setting, high up overlooking a large park, and Woodforde must have seen it being built during his visit in January 1771. Here we gathered for the visit to No. 1 Royal Crescent. This magnificent house was presented to the City by a previous owner and it is now displayed as a faithful replica of its original appearance including all furnishings and even the elaborate table settings on the dining table.

The fourth venue of the tour was the Building of Bath Museum. This is sited within the Chapel built and owned by the champion of Methodism, the Countess of Huntingdon. Her chaplain was the famous evangelist, George Whitefield, who was the regular preacher. The Chapel retains its main features, the podium and galleries, and now also contains an extensive display of pictures of the construction of various buildings in Bath and samples of the tools and materials used in the Georgian period.

In between these visits we walked to a nearby street for a very pleasant light lunch at a restaurant in the lower ground floor of a typical Georgian house. The last tour was completed around 2.45 pm after which we could either rejoin the open top touring bus or enjoy some individual sightseeing or shopping. The bus tour took us around the main features of the city and then climbed up the steep Widcombe hill on the southern outskirts of the town. A gap between the prevalent showers prompted most members to brave the upper deck of the bus and enjoy the magnificent views of the city from the top of the hill, even if they were somewhat windswept. We returned to the hotel where some of the older members were grateful for a rest before getting ready for the evening festivities.

We met again at 6.15 pm for a sherry reception before the formal dinner began at 7 pm. After another excellent meal we were addressed by the guest speaker, Trevor Fawcett, on the eighteenth century history of Bath. Mr Fawcett captivated his audience with a vivid account of the city as it was in Woodforde's time. He said that it was then possibly the most admired city in Europe and was visited by thousands of people during the high season, between September and May. During the period of its most rapid growth, 1750 to 1800, the population grew twelvefold from around 3000 to 35,000, making it the twelfth largest town in England. Although it catered mainly for the wealthy, Mr Fawcett also painted a picture of the poorer people who included most of the vast army of building workers. He had also brought along copies of his recent book, an

anthology about eighteenth century Bath, which was bought by many members.

At 9.15 on Sunday morning we assembled for the walk to the Roman baths and Pump Room where, like Woodforde himself, some members drank the spa water, finding the taste unusual but quite pleasant. We wandered around the large display of pictures and models of the Roman buildings and temples which had formed the site and listened to the recorded guide on individual record players. Then we were guided around the several Roman Baths, seeing the steam rising from the very warm waters – in conjunction with the falling rain!

It was then time to make the short crossing of the forecourt of the Pump Room to enter the Abbey for the Matins service at 11 o'clock. A special set of pews had been reserved for us near the high altar beyond the choir stalls and we had a good view of the magnificent interior of the Abbey. There was a very large attendance in the main body of the church and the service began with an impressive procession of the large choir of men and boys. There was some splendid singing of anthems by the choir and our president, George Bunting, read the first lesson. The sermon was delivered by the Rector, Prebendary Richard Askew, and it was made specially interesting as the Rector was familiar with Woodforde. After welcoming us to the Abbey on Ascension Sunday, he described how different was the world of Woodforde from that of today, and he quoted a passage from the diary when Woodforde and Nancy were visiting the Custance family. Overall, it was an impressive and moving service, much appreciated by our members.

And so, after walking leisurely back to the hotel, we assembled for the final event, the traditional Sunday lunch. The winner of the Quiz competition about Woodforde at Bath was Mr Bell who, with disarming honesty, acknowledged that he had been much aided by cribbing from Roy Winstanley's 1995 article on the subject. The Frolic concluded with much applause and thanks to the organizers Anne Williams and her husband David, who had both worked so hard to produce such a superb and successful programme. And then, apart from a few who were staying on for more sightseeing, we made our farewells and departed with many memories of a most enjoyable occasion.

## NOTES AND QUERIES

### *Squinancy*

This is a fine eighteenth century medical word which ought to be found in Woodforde's diary but is unaccountably missing from its pages. His own contemporaries used it to describe a throat ailment, later shortened to quinsy. Neither form would be used today for diagnosis of the condition, which would be called ulcerative tonsillitis.

Robert Burns was a sufferer from this complaint, and wrote in a letter of 1790:

I must inform you farther that I have ... had a most malignant Squinancy which had me very near the precincts of the Grave. I am now got greatly better, though by no means in a confirmed state of health.

— *Letters of Robert Burns, ed. J. De Lancey Ferguson, 2nd Edition by J. Ross Roy. 2 vols, Clarendon Press (1983) 422.*

The "squinancy berry" was blackcurrant, alluding to the very old belief that this fruit was good for morbid conditions of the chest and throat; which also explains why the Parson sent blackcurrant jam to his maidservant who was dying of pulmonary tuberculosis. There is also a plant called squinancywort, the quinsy-wort or small woodruff (*Asperula cynanchia*), likewise self-explanatory.

Letters and enquiries to Mrs Ann Elliott, The Green Corner, Deopham Green, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 9DP.

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### JOURNAL XXX, 1 – ERRATA

Front Cover Caption: for "Francis" read *Francesco*

p. 32 line 12 from foot: for "Richard" read *Dieuhard*

p. 34 line 12 from foot: del. "the" before *England*

p. 37 line 17: add *to* after *listen*.

p. 40 line 11: for "cultural" read *cultured*

## 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.

### PARSON WOODFORDE SOCIETY COMMITTEE 1997/8

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Dr Nigel Custance  
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