

# FRIENDS OF LYDIARD TREGOZ

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**The FRIENDS OF LYDIARD TREGOZ** was formed in 1967 with the approval and full support of St.Mary's Church and the Borough of Swindon.

The objects of the society are to:

- foster interest in the Church, the House, and the Parish as a whole.
- hold one meeting in the House annually, usually in mid-May, with a guest speaker. The meeting is followed by tea in the dining room and Evensong in the Parish Church.
- produce annually *Report*, a magazine of articles which are concerned in the broadest way with the history of the parish, its buildings and people, the St.John family and its antecedents as well as more locally-based families, and the early years of the Sir Walter St.John School in Battersea.  
Copies of *Report* are deposited with libraries and institutions in England, Wales, and the United States of America.  
The offer of articles for inclusion is always welcomed by the Editor.
- make occasional small contributions from unexpended income towards the cost of projects in either the House or the Church.

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## TWO ROYAL VISITS

**1997**

On 7 November Her Majesty the Queen attended a reception and dined at Lydiard Park as part of her tour of Swindon. The lunch was hosted by Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the reception for fifty guests was held in the State Rooms of the House. In line with the Council's wish to show the town as it really is no 'smartening up' money was available for the Queen's visit, though meticulous planning was essential.

In the weeks leading up to the royal visit Lydiard Park Management Centre staff prepared an appropriate menu for submission to the Palace while museum staff polished and prepared the State Rooms. For a house which is always well presented, it is surprising how much can be found to do. The impending visit provided a focus and a spur to complete all sorts of small cost-free improvements.

The security operation which underpinned the Queen's visit to Lydiard began well in advance of the day as police and security officers familiarised themselves with the House. This culminated in their intensive search of the building on the evening before the royal visit and in their discreet presence on the day.

A huge downpour was followed by bright sunshine as crowds gathered in front of the House to see the Queen arrive. On the steps of the House Councillor Derique Montaut (Chairman of the Community and Leisure Services Committee), Sarah Finch-Crisp (Keeper of the House), and Christine Pilkington (MD of the Management Centre) waited to greet her. Before long the royal cars swept through the park, and moments later the Queen appeared in front of the House. She was accompanied by the Lord Lieutenant of Wiltshire, her Lady-in-Waiting, Private Secretary, and Equerry. With introductions complete, the royal visit began.

In the Library the Queen was invited to sign a special page of the Visitors Book by Mr Gerard Leighton, President of the Friends of Lydiard Tregoz. She asked about the history of the House and commented on the State Rooms, all of which she saw decked with flowers arranged by Swindon floristry students from nearby Lackham College.

In the Hall she was introduced to the Bishop of Swindon and other local dignitaries before going on to meet members of the Chamber of Commerce and local charitable institutions. After the guests had dispersed to the dining room upstairs Sarah Finch-Crisp talked to the Queen about the House, the St. John family, and the Council's role in restoring the building. Having already spotted that the back of the House differed greatly from the front the Queen showed an informed interest in Lydiard's architectural features and history.

The lunch itself proved to be a great success. Catering for fifty people upstairs was no mean feat, with staff negotiating long-deserted servants' passages and stairs to serve the meal, a chicken and wild mushroom dish followed by the chef's specially created 'Lydiard pudding.'

The Queen left at 2.50 p.m. after meeting members of staff in the Hall. On behalf of the Council Sarah Finch-Crisp presented her Majesty with a picture of 'Lydiard through the Trees' by Swindon artist Peter Burton. The autumn scene mirrored views outside, the Queen looked pleased and thanked all the staff. The Lord Lieutenant then retrieved his sword, and the royal party left to continue their tour of Swindon.

## **AND 1592**

This was not the first royal visitor to Lydiard. On Friday, 1 September 1592, Queen Elizabeth I was with the court at Lydiard Park. (See *Report 4* (1971) 70, and *5* (1972) 82.) Her progress that Autumn left Nonsuch Palace on 8 August. She was at Bisham (Berks.) on 13 August and at Newbury on the 26th. She arrived at Ramsbury on the 28th, and at Liddington on the 29th (H.M.C., *Salisbury MS. 13*, 464-67). It is not known where the court stayed, but it is likely that the Queen stayed at Lydiard at least for the night of 31 August because the Privy Council met at Lydiard Park on 1 September. From Lydiard she went to Down Ampney and stayed there until the 2nd, then to Sudeley Castle (10th-12th), Oxford (22nd-28th), and Rycote (Oxon.) (29th-1 October), and was back at Hampton Court Palace by 10 October.

The preparations for the visit in 1592 must have been on a daunting scale. Lady Johanna St.John felt increasing anxiety in 1663 when plans were being made for the visit of the Lord Chancellor - "he brings at least 40 in his own Train besides my Lord Middleton who gos with him all his Journey." In 1592 the Queen travelled with her court officials, her bodyguard, and her baggage train. Clerks and other attendants accompanied the members of the Privy Council who came with her - Lord Burghley, Lord Hunsdon, Sir Thomas Hennege, Sir Robert Cecil, and others. Then there was the army of servants with all sorts of skills who looked after every aspect of the progress. In all, it was a great concourse to be fed and entertained. Supplies would have to be obtained wherever they were available: the house and every bit of accommodation that could be found would have to be made ready and fit for the occasion. To be visited by the Queen on one of her progresses was an exceedingly expensive affair for the one who was thus honoured. It was also the practice to give the Queen a suitable gift.

Where it was appropriate on her progresses, the Queen could show her pleasure by knighting her host, and this undoubtedly happened to John St.John. Lord Burghley entered in his diary for 29 August 1592, To Lyddyard. Mr. St.Johns.' A month later, while they were at Rycote, the Privy Council addressed a letter to 'Sir John St.John, knight.'

The royal visit in 1997 meant a great deal of forward planning, and, no doubt, plenty of butterflies in the tummy on the day, but the visit in 1592 must have been vastly expensive for the St.Johns and a real cause for panic in the weeks that led up to the visit.

## COVENTRYS AND ST. JOHNS

by Mark Crispin Powell

[Mr. Powell is on the staff of the Northamptonshire Record Office and has been a member of the Friends for a number of years. He has very kindly permitted the Editor to shorten a very much longer monograph of his for inclusion in this year's Report. A copy of the complete monograph, fully referenced, will be kept in the Friends' archive at Lydiard Park.]

High society needs centres of attraction, persons, and places that briefly become, according to the whims of fashion, the chief talking points of people who spend their hours absorbed in the pursuit of pleasure. The society beauty was one of the prerequisites of the season. In 1751 the women everyone talked about in London were the Gunning sisters, Maria, the eldest, who was only eighteen, and Elizabeth, hardly a year younger. Maria was born in the July of 1732 at Hemingford Grey, a village in Huntingdonshire, to John Gunning and his wife, the Honourable Bridget Bourke. Hemingford Grey probably never produced a more famous 'daughter', for Maria - despite a short life, and partly because of it - became one of the most celebrated women of her generation. She was remembered by her contemporaries long after her death even though her story is seldom recalled today. Maria was one of those singular women whose life was marked by notoriety and foolishness, yet she succeeded in being admired and fondly remembered, leaving an indelible impression on all those who came close to her.

Mr Gunning was the heir to an Irish estate at Castle Coote in co. Roscommon, and his wife was the daughter of Viscount Mayo in the Irish peerage. They had four children who grew to maturity, a son and three daughters, of whom Maria was the eldest. Her sisters were Elizabeth, born in November 1733, and Catherine, born in 1735. The family lived at Hemingford until 1737 when Mr. Gunning's father died and he inherited the Castle Coote estate. The place had not been run on sound financial lines, and the situation was made worse by the Gunnings' habit of living persistently above their means. It was not many more years until the couple had bankrupted the estate and economies set in. Then, in 1748, they closed their eyes to this and escaped simply by moving to Dublin and not leaving a forwarding address. Here the heady temptation of high society began to double and then triple existing debts. Those made in the country relentlessly pursued them there, and Mr Gunning suddenly found himself harassed by two sets of equally determined creditors. He fell back on the old tactic, and left the city to hide in the country, leaving his womenfolk to deal, in the event, far more successfully with the cruel world. Just when the situation seemed insoluble they were rescued by the actress George Ann Bellamy. (Their saviour's somewhat unusual name being the result of a mistake made at her christening when the deaf vicar should have heard the name Georgiana.)

Miss Bellamy was a successful Dublin actress who came upon the Gunning ladies abandoned, and probably recognised that the beauty and personalities of Maria and Elizabeth would be great assets in her profession. The story goes, and it may well be true, that one day the actress was returning from her rehearsals when she came across the bailiffs trying to force their way into Mrs Gunning's house. She and her lovely daughters were pleading with the men from an upstairs window and perhaps their distresses might have earned them sympathy, but Miss Bellamy intervened, no doubt impressed by the performance, and managed to postpone the day of reckoning. Mr Gunning was still enjoying the country air, and Lord Mayo, Mrs Gunning's brother, had washed his hands of them, so Miss Bellamy arranged to take in Maria and Elizabeth while the younger children went to an aunt and Mrs Gunning found her husband. At midnight on the day appointed the family possessions were smuggled out of

the house to save them from the returning bailiffs next morning, and the girls were soon dreaming of footlights, applause, and handsome admirers hidden in the wings.

As it turned out the sisters barely gave the stage a backward glance, so rapid was their rise to fame, but Miss Bellamy may well have found time to supplement the girls' natural talents in the art of public performance. They certainly met the celebrated actress Mrs Peg Woffington along with Sheridan's father, who managed a city theatre, and in later life the girls displayed the quite remarkable gift of being 'affected', as contemporaries put it, just when they wanted. Whether this art was congenital or learnt, they soon made full use of it, injected as they were into the main stream of Dublin society.

Their first big social event was the Lord Lieutenant's ball in 1750, held at Dublin Castle, going in dresses lent from a theatrical wardrobe. They became the talking point of the evening, and duly impressed the reigning Dublin beauty Lady Caroline Petersham, the daughter-in-law of the Lord Lieutenant, the Earl of Harrington. It was Mrs Gunning, however, who took the lead in ambition for her daughters, and felt that they could do better than the stage if they were introduced in London society: she was, after all, the daughter of a viscount, even though her relations had largely turned their backs on them. She seems to have saved up some money as security, which, considering her history, must prove some moral or other. Then Lady Caroline became the target for a friendship since she could get the daughters personally presented to Lord Harrington.

Very soon after the ball an audience with Lord Harrington was duly arranged and it went very well, the recent festivities being still in his Lordship's mind. Maria and Elizabeth were presented in outfits borrowed from Mrs Woffington since they had none which were fit enough for the occasion. Lord Harrington and his family were preparing to return to England, his term in Ireland being almost at an end, and he was more than willing to introduce the Gunnings to potentially valuable connections of his own in London. Although the family had no money, they did have pretensions to nobility through Mrs Gunning, which would make them acceptable, and Harrington was shrewd enough to realise what great assets Maria and Elizabeth could be to London's social calendar. When the Harrington suite returned to England the Gunnings followed in their wake and, on his arrival, Harrington placed the girls in the capable hands of the Duchess of Bedford. The Duchess was a formidable woman, proud, determined, and usually very bad-mannered in everything she did. Such merits did little for her popularity in society, but they gave her power and attention. The girls would not enter the new season unnoticed or without support.

They were a great success, and the sisters were soon in demand far outside the confines of the Bedford House set. Maria and Elizabeth were almost immediately labelled the most beautiful women in England, and there was accordingly a tremendous fuss around them. An amazed Horace Walpole wrote in June 1751 that, 'these are the two Irish girls of no fortune who are declared the handsomest women alive.' He added, always notoriously difficult to please, 'I think their being two, so handsome and both such perfect figures is their chief excellence, for singly I have seen much handsomer women than either.' Others though were far less restrained. Henry Fox, later Lord Holland, told his wife that Maria was 'more beautiful than an angel' and that he had never seen 'anyone at all near to her or like her.' His friend Charles Hanbury-Williams confessed that he would be happy just looking at Maria's face for hours as an inspiration. The trouble was that half of London had the same idea. Walpole wrote that they could not walk in the park or even go down to the pleasure gardens at Vauxhall without mobs following them. Sometimes things seem to have got quite out of hand. One incident saw an Irish friend actually brandishing his sword in front of an over-excited crowd, an action which gave the sisters chance to escape into Lord Harrington's house near by. In an age before film or television, such mass attention so soon after their arrival was a truly remarkable thing: it was certainly something new. Their humble circumstances had much general appeal and, unlike the exclusive courtesans or haughty countesses, they enjoyed being seen.

Walpole felt that Maria was the more beautiful: she was blessed with large liquid brown eyes and, according to Mrs Delany, had 'a thousand dimples and prettiness in her cheeks', which gave her face great brightness and animation. Elizabeth had a more classical look, perhaps less individual, with a perfect oval face and a complexion like marble. Both girls were tall and had superb figures with endless brown hair. Walpole also considered Maria the stupider of the two, and, in fact, neither of the sisters became known for their sense or, for that matter, for their discretion. Despite this - or more certainly because of it - Walpole became one of Maria's most ardent admirers, and he diligently followed her career in his now celebrated letters to his friends.

Walpole was a popular fixture in London society, noted for his wit and taste. He was also a very scholarly man, and he wrote seriously on a number of subjects, principally on the arts and culture. His letters, however, are what he is best remembered for. They mainly gossip on about social events and personalities in London, and they mention nearly everyone and everything of importance in that sphere for over half a century. One of the most enjoyable features of his letters is the malicious pleasure he shows in highlighting other people's failings and failures, and clearly his opinions of such failings need to be tempered with caution, since, as with most gossip, only the most entertaining parts of the story receive attention.

His interest in Maria can also be seen in this light, though his words do really capture the essence of the sisters' fame. However, it was the diarist Mrs Delany who managed to put what was in his many letters into a couple of sentences. She wrote of Maria, 'she is a fine figure and vastly handsome, not withstanding a silly look sometimes about her mouth; She has a thousand airs but with a sort of innocence that diverts one.' On a similar theme Dr Treadway Nash, the Worcestershire county historian recalled after Maria's death, 'the sweetness of her disposition' and 'the goodness of her heart.' His comments and those of Mrs Delany were, of course, far kinder than Walpole's frank amusement at her lack of sophistication and foolishness, but, in one sense at least, his views were the more accurate since it was he rather than they who represented the true feelings of people among whom the sisters now circulated with such sensational success. They had incredible beauty, a sweet charm, pliable innocence, and an amusing lack of sense. The sisters seemed to be classic examples of a stereotype.

Walpole relates how, when asked by the king if she felt bored by the lack of masquerades that year, Maria had replied that she had seen enough of such things but what she did look forward to was seeing a coronation. The king, who was an old man, apparently took this blunder with the greatest of humour and even told it to his family at supper. Naturally their Irish background compounded the sisters' appeal, with an element of rustic colour and freshness in their charms. So, obviously subdued, it was all the more amusing when it rose unblemished to the surface in moments of ease or excitement. 'At a great supper t'other night at Lord Hertford's,' Walpole wrote, 'if she was not the best humoured creature in the world I should have made her angry: she said in a very vulgar accent, if she drank any more she should be "muckibus".' Lady Mary Coke, surprised by this sudden and rather loud declaration, wanted to know what it meant, and Walpole cut in with an explanation that it was Irish for 'sentimental' - his effort at wit rather than a true affinity with the darker side of Celtic vocabulary.

All things considered, Maria was always recognised as an asset at a party since apart from her looks and nature, she dressed and danced extremely well. Much of the sisters 'stupidity' was merely an expression of unfamiliarity in a new and very contrived environment. Neither of the sisters was secure in these months, in sophisticated society for the first time without any real foundation or retreat, yet suddenly the reigning toast of the capital. Ideally what each sister needed was a husband to weather the tides of fashion, or a cosy position as mistress to some wealthy man. Elizabeth, once married and clear of the limelight, soon shed her childish image and in fact transformed herself into a clever woman who eventually became a baroness in her own right. The sisters had a brother who joined the army and

later became a general, having gained some credit for his conduct at Bunker Hill. Maria meanwhile, once settled, cared enough about drama to patronise at least one relatively unknown playwright, and she even introduced his work to Garrick.

The Gunnings' main contribution to patronage, beside inspiring countless portraits, was the career of the artist Francis Cotes. He had similar origins to the sisters and, although born in London, his family had been settled in co. Roscommon. All the Gunnings sat for him in London - father, mother, all three sisters, and the brother - fine pastel portraits, the kind at which Cotes excelled. The portraits of Maria and Elizabeth effectively made his name since they were leapt upon by various engravers, who turned out a barrage of prints, all snapped up by an eager public. This avid trade in cheap prints was one good reason why the fame of the sisters reached such universal proportions, and why every artist hoped for a sitting. Soon the sisters' portraits were decorating snuffboxes, tankards, medals, and all manner of product saleable to meet popular curiosity.

Elizabeth's path to security began in February 1752, at a smart reception held to mark the completion of Lord Chesterfield's beautiful new mansion at Hyde Park Corner, a masterpiece which our age has been wanton enough to destroy. On this occasion the magnificent gilded state rooms were crowded, but Walpole managed to notice Elizabeth and the young Duke of Hamilton getting very intimate in one corner of a room. His Grace had a reputation for being nearly always the worse for drink and even when sober was not apparently the brightest of men. A few days later he called on Elizabeth to find Maria and Mrs Gunning tactfully out at Bedford House. The evening wore into night, and Hamilton was teased and tempted along with the whole Gunning arsenal of charms but without results, so he began to fling about promises of marriage if Elizabeth proved her love to him in the way he wanted. At last they were married with a curtain ring at 12.30 a.m., the Mayfair Chapel. This chapel, a tiny hole of a place next to Chesterfield House, was notorious for its less than respectable marriages. All the same, Elizabeth rather suddenly found herself the new Duchess of Hamilton and Brandon, at the head of Scotland's most noble house and the mistress of several large mansions and a palace.

Chief among Maria's admirers was the new Earl of Coventry, fresh from designing his park and apparently enjoying the wider world of the Court for the first time. Walpole quickly came to the conclusion that Coventry was 'green' in more ways than just the enthusiasm he showed for his park. This was principally because he began to court Maria far too seriously. Coventry would not have Maria as his mistress - his principles were far too perfect for that: he was a 'grave young lord', in Walpole's words, so instead he played the gentleman and the suitor much to everyone else's amusement. Maria was after all not being overly discreet about her amorous adventures, and she must have found Coventry's cautious and subtle attempts to engage her attentions quite odd.

Maria had sense enough to press Coventry for a decision one way or the other - marriage or, much more likely, a settlement on her as his mistress. On 20 February 1752, Lady Pomfret recorded for posterity the day of reckoning. 'My Lord Coventry,' she wrote, 'unfortunately for him, appeared at Court the morning the married couple [the Hamiltons] set out for the Archadian Fields and was bated as he deserved, some say he cryed out that he immediately intended to follow so right an example and make the eldest Miss Gunning a peeress as well as her sister.' This he did and on 5 March, just under three weeks after a curtain ring had secured Elizabeth's future, Maria became the new Countess of Coventry.

After the marriage Coventry took Maria to Charlton, a mansion in Kent Lord Ashburnham had lent him, for a brief intimate holiday not too far from London. Coventry needed time to make arrangements for a more public, 'set piece' honeymoon, and he wanted Maria to prepare herself properly for presentation at Court. They remained in London until the start of May, when Coventry decided it was time for Maria to see Croome, his seat in Worcestershire. On the 22nd June Coventry and Maria set

out for the French Court on honeymoon. Walpole wryly noted that by the time the couple had reached Calais Maria had decided she was actually in love with her husband. Lord Downe had apparently offered her the use of his tent bed to avoid the bugs that were usually additional guests in the inns. Maria then brightly replied that she would 'rather be bit to death than lie one night from my dear Cov.' Despite this promising start the whole French episode was a complete disaster. Coventry was very protective and possessive, anxious to shield Maria from temptation and further public adulation. He wanted a respectable Countess and a loyal wife, not a social 'butterfly', prey to every indulgence and flirtation. Clearly Coventry's faith in Maria's ability to provide him with these qualities unaided was somewhat limited. He braced himself for a long campaign of instruction, and was consumed by a gnawing doubt that he would never succeed.

Coventry's efforts to transform Maria into the ideal wife soon became rather excessive, as Chesterfield observed, 'Lord Coventry has used... Lady Coventry very brutally at Paris, and made her cry more than once in public.' He even went so far as to ban the use of cosmetics, and Walpole rather dramatically relates one incident over this when Coventry's anxieties got the better of his composure and more or less put an end to their honeymoon. It was at a dinner given by Sir John Bland. Coventry suspected his wife of stealing 'a little red', and after abruptly dragging her up from the dinner table, he scrubbed the rouge off with his handkerchief in front of sixteen other guests. It was simply Coventry's love for Maria and his fear of losing her, on top of a naturally fretful and morality-driven character, that made him act so severely.

In the end it was probably just as well that they were returning to England. The Court of Versailles had some far more captivating and sophisticated women, so it was said, whom even Englishmen abroad felt were far superior to Maria's naive and obviously unrefined charms. For one thing she did not speak a word of French, and Coventry's was poor enough to embarrass himself at least once. Despite the personal difficulties the honeymoon had a surprisingly influential effect on Coventry. He was dazzled by the elegance and richness of Versailles and over the mansions in Paris, returning to England firmly impressed by what he had seen. It was the starting point for a new passion that came to dominate his life and resulted in his greatest achievements.

Back in London, Coventry found his problems were still at the forefront of his mind. At least the French had been largely unimpressed: in London Maria was still the subject of a near mania, and she was once again declared the most beautiful woman alive. Coventry had to endure this situation because he now had commitments which kept him at Court. On his return to England he had taken up his duties as a Lord of the Bedchamber to George II. This was a largely ceremonial post, but it had a salary and some status attached to it. Above all, it was useful as a starting point for greater things. Future advancements would inspire respect, create dignity, and conjure up an envied reputation, all strong desires which rather than any obligation kept Coventry at Court and in society full-time. Politically the post could be quite important, too, if it were used in the right way, since Bedchamber Lords, as the name implies, had personal access to the king and they were attendant on him at various public functions. Coventry's appointment probably had much to do with Maria who, of course, rapidly became a royal favourite. Thankfully the king was too old for participation in any scandal, but with Coventry in his service, he had plenty of opportunity to admire her.

In February 1753 Walpole remarked upon the end of the 'Gunning era', and that the papers were very nearly empty of reports on the sisters' activities. However, now that public attention had dissolved somewhat, Maria began to feel rather bored with life, especially since the attempted restrictions of her husband bore down without such intoxicating diversions. The controls wielded by Coventry were the worst kind, petty, unreasonable, and contrite: they promoted a staleness and suffocation in the union rather than a reaction that could provoke change for the better or for worse.

Time spent away from London down at Croome must have been particularly tiresome, a breeding ground for discontent. Things went from bad to worse, and in the Spring of 1754 Maria found herself embroiled in her first serious affair. This was with Frederick St John, 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke and 3rd Viscount St. John. He was the nephew of the late Lord Bolingbroke, the brilliant and notorious leader of the Tories. Unfortunately the uncle had passed rather more on to his nephew than just a title, for the 2nd Lord Bolingbroke was as unsavoury as his predecessor, indulging in most of the noble vices but taking little seriously outside his passion for racing horses. He was an irresponsible man rather than a wicked one, who seems to have made an effort all his life to appear as witty and dissolute as his uncle. As a member of the Bedford House set he had presumably met Maria quite early on in her career and perhaps they had enjoyed one another's company during that time. Walpole broached news of the new affair in his own inimitable style, writing that when the king had sent for Maria to dance, 'it was quite like Herodias, and I believe if he had offered her a boon, she would have chosen the head of St. John. I believe I told you of her passion for the young Lord Bolingbroke.'

Coventry's suspicions were enough to keep him constantly vigilant of his wife's activities, perhaps even to the extent of having her spied upon and followed. Lord Chesterfield once wrote that Maria had, 'long ago objected to a certain inquisitiveness and impertinent curiosity, which she observed in My Lord's temper, and therefore very pleasantly gave him the name of "Peeping Tom of Coventry".' According to one scandal sheet Maria was driven to going very early to the Opera - before even the singers arrived - to meet with Bolingbroke in one of the darkened upper boxes of the auditorium. But the guilty couple must have been less than circumspect in other ways, for their relationship was soon common gossip throughout London.

Chesterfield wrote in March 1756 that Coventry was a brute for being 'ill-natured enough to send his wife to perpetual exile in his mansion seat in Worcestershire' just because she had slept with Bolingbroke. Chesterfield's opinion was less than impartial since he had been a good friend of Bolingbroke's uncle and had taken on responsibility for the young man's education in Paris. If Maria was packed off to Croome in disgrace her captor soon relented and brought her back to London where unabated she continued to be seen with whom she liked. No doubt Croome had seen a dramatic repentance-scene staged which convinced Coventry, or a breakdown into quiet suffering that inspired pity and love in him. Perhaps his pride dictated the necessity for a beautiful, and, hopefully, restored wife, to appear by his side. Separation would certainly not improve his cherished reputation, only acknowledge that it had been damaged. Such an exile was not really very effective anyway because George Selwyn, another noted wit and gossip, recalled that, when at Croome, Maria had secret letters delivered to her from Bolingbroke by 'Giles, the parson'. Obviously the affair was exciting enough to corrupt the church.

Maria was both warm and innocent enough to assume that Bolingbroke's dearest wish was to marry her if only she were free. No doubt her over-active imagination was fuelled by promises and dreams that made her blissfully romantic, her suitor knowing that the chances of Coventry dying or giving up Maria were remote. During June 1757, however, Coventry did fall seriously ill, and the prospect of his funeral, which was expected by some, had Bolingbroke 'frightened out of his wits', according to Lady Kildare. So much for his devotion, it was a sham and a facade, perhaps even played up to engineer yet another story of Maria's naïveté. Selwyn once told Lord Carlisle that he wished Bolingbroke had taken in 'some of those sentiments of honour and delicacy in love affairs which you have in all, instead of admiring his profligate uncle and Lord Chesterfield's affected systems.' He admitted that he felt Bolingbroke had 'some very good qualities, and naturally no ill ones.' Coventry's love had been real, but it was laced with conditions foreign to Maria, who found his coolness and constraint unfathomable. Meanwhile she unwittingly killed what remained by her casual liaisons and appetite for adoration.

As early as April 1756 Maria had already acquired the reputation of flirting widely and easily: she had also set up her sight quite high. Ever vigilant, Walpole noticed her and the king's youngest son, the Duke of Cumberland, out walking in Hyde Park. Cumberland is today almost solely known for his savage butchery of the defeated rebel Scots at Culloden, an action which then still earned him admiration some ten years after the event. 'How happy she must be,' wrote Walpole, 'with Billy and Bully' - Cumberland and Bolingbroke - 'I hope she will not mistake and call the former by the nickname of the latter.' Mrs Montagu wrote that Maria, 'this Venus... has already attacked our Mars, the Duke, and he sighs for her and languishes as much as a hero can languish in time of war.' She naturally liked the thought of capturing the attentions of a royal duke, especially a war hero, and she made the most of it though the liaison was never serious. At a ball given in Cumberland's honour at the magnificent Norfolk House Mrs Delany noted that 'the Duke danced with Lady Coventry, so that there was at least one happy woman for three or four hours.' However, since the dancing went on until four in the morning there should have been at least some time when Maria's monopoly of the Duke's attentions was broken. Although only thirty-five Cumberland was one-eyed and little short of grossly fat - features unlikely to merit such demand had it not been for his rank and Scottish 'glories'.

In 1758 the Duke of Hamilton caught a cold out hunting and died as a result, his thirty-four-year-old constitution mined by endless drinking. Elizabeth then remarried, in 1759, Colonel John Campbell, the eldest son of the heir to the Scottish Dukedom of Argyll, uniting the two great Highland clans that were traditional and ancient enemies. At the time Walpole wrote admiringly that he wouldn't be surprised if Maria didn't become the next Queen of Prussia such was her capacity for cultivating admirers. (Britain was at that time engaged in war with France and Prussia.) Elizabeth eventually became Duchess of Argyll when her husband succeeded to the title in 1770, and she mothered both the 6th and 7th Dukes of Argyll as well as the 7th and 8th Dukes of Hamilton - a collection of coronets that was quite an achievement for a bankrupted Irish family.

Coventry had considered divorce back in the last months of 1756, rumours of which put 'the plump Countess [of Guilford, and Bolingbroke's aunt] in terrors' that her nephew should marry Maria. Walpole's verdict had been that it was a 'well-imagined panic.' Divorce in the eighteenth century was a very long drawn out, complex and expensive process, and that apart from all the scandal it required a special act of parliament. It was typical of Coventry to consider so drastic a step since his standards doubtless did not allow him the luxury of separation and a mistress, which was the more accepted and common alternative. Anyway there was the all-important question of a son and heir which had not been forthcoming. Coventry's prestige demanded that he should have a son to follow him, and neither his brother nor his cousin had children to succeed. He would either have to stay with Maria or divorce her properly to remarry. In the end time cured Coventry of the latter desire.

In 1757 Maria was pregnant, and hope temporarily mended the marriage. Instead of a son, a daughter was born and christened Anne Margaret. The little child survived and seemed healthy enough, so Coventry pinned his future on another chance. For Maria motherhood had so far been a catalogue of repeated misfortunes. Thankfully, in December 1754, a daughter Maria Alicia had been safely born, and then, finally, in April 1758, she gave Coventry the son he wanted, named George William after him. As heir the baby became Viscount Deerhurst at birth. 'Lady Coventry is safely delivered of a son,' wrote Lord Chesterfield, 'to the great joy of that noble family.' The sole dissension he noted in this happy affair was Maria herself, whose 'expression' seemed 'to be a proper and cautious one' because he felt that she had some doubts as to who the true father really was.

Pressure on the Coventry marriage was also lessened by the wedding of Bolingbroke to Lady Diana Spencer, a daughter of the Duke of Marlborough, in September 1757. The whole affair was rather haphazardly done if Mrs Delany's rumours were correct. Apparently Bolingbroke was at a party and,

being teased about when he was going to get married, turned round to Lady Diana - the first lady he saw - and proposed there on the spot only to be accepted. The company treated it all as a big joke, but later Bolingbroke, having mulled over the suitability of such a union, decided to make a serious affair of it and was accepted again. The trifling circumstances of such an engagement must have cut Maria to the core, and General Seymour-Conway, writing to Walpole, thought the match would break her heart. Walpole himself, about a month earlier, had angrily written that Bolingbroke and his brother ought to be whipped for their 'most abominable' behaviour towards Maria though it is not clear exactly what 'scandal' raised his temper.

Lady Diana, needless to say, came to regret her decision, and some people even predicted it. 'If he [Bolingbroke] has sense', wrote Mrs Delany, 'they may be happy, for he must then see the absurd figure he has hitherto made and know how to value a woman of worth, though so long the dupe of beauty and folly.' Mrs Delany's comment is interesting because, in contrast to Walpole, she casts Bolingbroke as something of a victim himself - the deluded fool intoxicated by a reigning beauty - but no doubt she was speaking generally, for Bolingbroke was as much an object of Maria's romantic contrivances as she was of his deceit and shallowness.

Maria was now reasonably safe in her marriage, but it was almost a prison with the romantic plans she relied on obliterated and Coventry endlessly dictating a controlling routine. The winter of 1759 saw Maria confined to her bed with a fever. It got steadily worse, and come the New Year people actually began to think it would kill her. In fact, the crisis dragged on well into January, and, even at the end of that month, Lady Caroline Fox was able to note that Maria was on the brink of death, staying at Bristol. In those days the place was a health resort rather like Bath pretended to be, with hot springs but without the temptations of society. 'One is less sorry for her I think,' she wrote, 'because she must have been very unhappy when old age came on and beauty went.' Such philosophy proved to be rather premature, however, and little more than a week into February saw Maria pronounced out of danger,

The recovery proved to be brief for by June Maria was ill again and this time it was clearly the much-dreaded Consumption. No Italian journey was conjured up for Maria, instead she was taken back to Croome to be treated, fresh country air having to suffice for the sun. Coventry no doubt accompanied Maria to Croome, but after a few weeks of no progress one way or the other he returned to London, leaving his wife in the care of Doctor John Wall. Dr Wall was locally quite an entrepreneur, being one of the founders of the future Royal Worcester Porcelain Company in 1751 as well as being the moving spirit behind the growing popularity of Malvern spring water in health matters. The enterprising doctor was almost constantly in attendance on Maria once Coventry had left, and early in August he described, in a letter to George Selwyn, the hardships of his patient's illness.

Everyone thought Maria was dying, and no-one felt she was strong enough to survive the winter. According to Dr Wall, a few days previous to his letter one had arrived from the Duchess of Hamilton, addressed to Coventry. Since he was not at Croome and Maria had recognised her sister's hand, it was opened and on plain paper she discovered just how desperate her condition really was. The distraught Duchess had written lamenting the fact that she would never see her sister alive again and that there was no possibility of hope for her, 'expressing her concern as for one already in the grave', wrote Dr Wall.

Maria was on the very edge of death throughout the summer, managing to survive until the autumn only to have to face the critical winter months. The Consumption was made manifestly worse by the highly toxic beauty aids ladies of society then wore, such as white lead and mercury which could choke up the pores or even actually eat into the skin, horrible as it was even to contemplate. Chesterfield had long ago warned that Maria perhaps used more than she needed. According to Mrs Delany a doctor

she knew swore it was all 'rank poison' and she hoped that Maria's fate would be 'a warning to her imitators.' It was not. In 1767 Lady Fortrose expired, aged only nineteen, in a cocktail of Consumption and, according to Walpole, white lead.

Maria could not tolerate the outside world looking in upon the ravages of illness so she died all alone in a dark and shuttered bedroom during the small hours of October 1<sup>st</sup> 1760. If the mansion has a ghost it must be Maria, for she was only twenty-seven when she died.

Bolingbroke was told of Maria's death at Newmarket, one of his very regular haunts, but despite a valiant effort to produce tears he found he was unable to keep them up convincingly and had to flee the room. A few years later he divorced his wife on her desertion, Lady Sarah Bunbury commenting that 'Lady Bolingbroke's reason for parting is that she cannot live with him with safety to her health.' According to her he was 'much the same as mad when he is drunk, and that he is generally.' Suffice it to say that Walpole was able to note some seven years before his death, 'Lord Bolingbroke is in a madhouse.'

Gilly Williams and George Selwyn seem to have regarded talk of Coventry's remarriage, during the early summer of 1764, with a mixture of hope for the sake of the children and regret for the selected matrimonial victim. The end of July saw one name apparent, Barbara St. John, the daughter of Baron St. John of Bletsoe and a very distant cousin of the Bolingbrokes. Coventry's second shopping excursion to Paris, in August, prolonged the courtship and the wedding date was set for before Michaelmas, 29<sup>th</sup> September. Thus, on his return, preparations were immediately set in motion, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> he married Barbara. To commemorate the event Coventry commissioned Sir Joshua Reynolds to paint a magnificent portrait of her. (Except for Ramsay, Reynolds was virtually unrivalled in portraiture at this time.) Barbara brought with her some respite for Coventry's financial worries though she was hardly a great heiress. Williams wrote of her modest £3,000 fortune, for which she was given a periodical rent-charge of £800 from the Coventry estates. His wedding gifts to Barbara included gold woven fabrics, diamonds, and a sedan chair topped with a large coronet, like the crown on the one that belonged to the Queen.

The new countess was in many ways different from Maria. One of her most notable characteristics was her practicality, a motion which Williams found quite amusing. 'You will laugh at her plan of life,' he wrote, 'when you know it, as it seems a studied and affected contrast to her predecessor.' Several anecdotes exist as testimony to this good sense, and one of these concerns Coventry's new house which fronted on to Piccadilly. Rather than having to cross the road to reach Green Park on the opposite side, Barbara had a subway constructed which led from inside the mansion to the Ranger's House in the park. She was also apparently quite capable of sitting down and working a small carpet to Adam's design for the new house.

A warm-hearted nature was one of the traits that Barbara had in common with Maria, and it made her an enormously likable person. In the early days of the marriage this congeniality was in danger of being stifled by a series of domestic problems. There was the usual post-nuptial awkwardness, 'all prettiness, fright, insipidity, question and answer', Williams described her. She proved to be a very loving step-mother to the girls, if not a very good one, cosseting them and letting their bad behaviour run away unchecked.

The most formidable problem Barbara had to overcome was the 'Rebecca-like' shadow of Maria, whose reputation she was now measured against. Barbara was never the sensational beauty Maria had been but she was pretty, and Mary Townshend, writing to Selwyn, even goes so far as to note that her looks were 'for some days set above that of your old friend', but sadly concluded, 'now, she is scarcely allowed to be pretty.' Her serious fault in the eyes of the public was her lack of glamour and

panache - attributes that Maria had so brilliantly exploited. 'A most unworthy successor to the bustle and uproar which followed that name formerly' was Williams' verdict, and he notes that she even failed to make a splash at the opera, sitting in her box as 'private' and 'palefaced' as a spinster - a great disappointment to the crowd down in the stalls. Social life must have been quite an effort for Barbara at this time. She was ill soon after the wedding, and Coventry's attitude towards her was difficult and even perhaps strained for some months.

About a week after her wedding Barbara was officially introduced at Court as the new countess. The king already knew her and liked her before this harrowing public presentation, but no-one seems to have climbed on any chairs to see her. The following morning, in something of a malaise, Barbara set out with Coventry for their honeymoon at Croome. Coventry's behaviour throughout had been cool, formal, and calculating, Williams commenting that he didn't think his friend was 'cut out for decent and matrimonial gallantry.' Williams had first-hand knowledge of the couple, having dined with them, under considerably awkward circumstances, a couple of days after the wedding. He called Barbara 'very pretty' but 'all grimace', and he noted how well she treated the children.

He was more shrewd about Coventry, however, as he was once again trying to fit his wife into an idealised model. 'He means to instruct by lectures in his table talk and by drawing pictures of good and bad wives,' he wrote, 'you know how he succeeded in the last [meaning Maria]; God grant him better success in his present plan.' It is evident from Williams's other comments that he had grave doubts about the marriage working and felt it a great shame for the children's sake. He based these considerations, perhaps unfairly, on the Maria episode and Coventry's subsequent irreverence towards women, who, according to Williams, Coventry regarded as mere playthings. He expected Coventry to quickly tire of Barbara as well, but thankfully he seems to have underestimated his friend.

Barbara, who does seem to have become the perfect wife, was to some extent saved from the full pressure of Coventry's campaigns by her own good nature and the support of her companion and etiquette tutor (or toadeater, as Williams called her) a Miss Houblon whom Coventry had employed for her. No doubt suitably instructed by the able Miss Houblon Barbara got through being presented to the country undisgraced, taking away only a few verbal scars. The local people were as unenthusiastic about her as London had been, and the welcome she got was nowhere near as rapturous as that given to Maria. There was a large crowd to see her go into church at Croome, broadly respectful but with the few mutters about how second-class she was in comparison. It is impossible to tell how soon and if they changed their minds, but the Coventrys intended to stay at Croome until after Christmas so there was plenty of time to impress the neighbours. The Duke of York seems to have paid a second visit to Croome towards the middle of October. There were excursions to Spring Hill and Worcester, return visits to be made to the wedding well-wishers, as well as tours of inspection over Coventry's new projects. Coventry and Barbara returned to London themselves earlier than planned, in mid-December, probably before the weather got any worse and to make room for the workmen who were about to descend on Croome to carry out more work on the interior.

Back in London, the attitudes to Barbara had not changed and she still found it impossible to escape unfavourable comparison with a ghost. Another thorn in her and Coventry's sides was Bolingbroke for whom Coventry's remarriage was an opportunity for some innocuous taunts. He was keen to hear all the gossip he could from Williams at White's even before the honeymoon had begun, and talked of visiting Barbara as they were of the same family. (Their common ancestor had died in 1437!) Some weeks later, when Bolingbroke's horse was especially successful at Newmarket, he even threatened to call his next mare 'Barbara' in honour of the new countess. Another potentially difficult relationship was with the Duchess of Hamilton, Maria's sister, with whom they dined early in January. Thankfully the duchess only managed a modest tear when the new countess was announced. The mother, Mrs Gunning, was less charitable, at least initially, and would not call but hoped to see the children separately.

Coventry and Barbara had forty years of married life and a second family together. They had two sons, John and Thomas, and a daughter, named after her mother, who tragically died as a baby. Coventry was a proper father to the boys, and they led happy, blameless lives. Sad to say, he never cared for Maria's children, especially his heir Lord Deerhurst, and perhaps this is why they were each involved in disastrous personal scandals. Deerhurst disgraced himself by leaving his regiment just on the eve of the American War and later blinded himself in a reckless hunting accident. Maria's two daughters, Lady Maria Bayntun Rolt and Lady Anne Foley, were both involved in messy divorce cases, and Lady Anne, in particular, left a long line of ex-lovers behind her. Thus the parents' troubles revisited their children.

Barbara never really escaped from the consequences of her predecessor either. When she died in 1804 Sir Herbert Croft gave her this rather cruel epitaph:

This variegated marble guards from the shameless eye of wanton curiosity all that remains of the once dauntless Lady C. Yet passenger, mistake not; Nor with rapturous zeal recall the long lost beauties of the fair Argyll's fairer sister [Maria], lest thou lament the pious error. Her purer ashes, by some guardian spirit shrouded from decay, immortalise a happier sepulchre; While gloomy terror with malicious finger points to the unhonoured tomb, where dwells the rival of her name. Malice and envy seemed to have marked her for their own. Relying on the Coventry Act for the security of her bones, she challenged her antagonists to maim her; Lord N., however, anxious to repay her insolent unkindness to his sister, proposed a ducking stool and the wretched Countess died in the operation. [Barbara had disapproved of Deerhurst's marriage to Lord Northington's sister.]

Barbara is probably best remembered today by the Saxon Tower on the hill above Broadway (Worcs.) as she was responsible for its site. Apparently she had beacons lit at all the possible locations and drove round the country at night to see which one stood out the best.

## NATURE NOTES

by Vernon Henry, 6th Viscount Bolingbroke

[Lord Bolingbroke died on 1 May 1974, aged seventy-eight. *In Reports* (1975), 9-12, there appeared an appreciation of him which was followed by the opening nine pages of an unfinished manuscript, 'Cycling Through Nature.' The promise was then given that more of Lord Bolingbroke's writings would be included in a future *Report*. That promise is now redeemed. During 1967 he contributed short articles to the *Ringwood and Fordingbridge Journal*. The editor of the Salisbury Journal Newspapers Limited has kindly agreed that extracts from eighteen of these articles may be reproduced, for which we are grateful.]

### JACOB THE THRUSH (11 January)

Ever since seeing my last cuckoo of 1966 on 15 September, flying southwards over one of Ringwood's lakes and escorted by a host of small birds, I wondered how our climate would treat wild life in the months to follow.

Well, as the Autumn tints were allowed to manifest their full glory for longer than usual by the absence of gales or frosts, so too did the late summer butterflies, red admiral, peacock, comma, speckled wood, as well as that wide-spread migrant moth the Silver Y, and also the small copper butterfly with its lustrous wings seen flitting about an unusual wayside plant of the wild succory, its deep flowers still conspicuous near the end of October.

Of our birds, perhaps, my favourite is the homely, familiar song thrush. One reason for this is that during the open spell which followed the November frosts and over Christmas and after, your thrush could be heard in the Avon Valley at first light, while a particularly fine songster heralded the day outside my windows further East. Another reason happens to be that I once kept a tame thrush which answered to the name Jacob. He flourished on a diet of oatmeal dumplings and provided the initial interest that led me to study the thrush family in the wild. Many will surely agree that his song is a distinguished one, even when competing with the dawn chorus in Spring and, indeed, how well it harmonizes with the countryside.

And so, as Christmas Eve drew near, another, softer, more warbling voice was heard: it was that of the innocent, hopeful dunnoek - a pleasant change from the plaintive twittering of robin redbreast. Then, as the green Christmas of 1966 came and went, nightly the December moth glanced up and down our lighted window, and the smaller, paler, abundant winter moth flickered in front of our torch as we shone our way through the darkness.

(8 February)

The telephone rang: and if I sensed urgency afoot I was not far wrong. A concerned voice at the other end lost no time in recounting something which is seldom brought to the notice of a field naturalist. It appeared that this harassed local housewife, busy with spring-cleaning, was dealing with a surprising number of flies from her windows and curtains. She was puzzled to discover that many of the flies were carrying smaller ones attached to them. What did it mean? Did I think that it was some sort of infection, some kind of disease likely to spread?

Well, the smaller ones she noticed were not flies nor were they insects at all since they belonged to a different order. They were, in fact, tiny creatures known as chelifers or false scorpions, the latter name because of their fancied resemblance to minute flattened scorpions that have lost their tails. They do, however, possess a pair of palpi or pinchers which are prehensile and important in their lives. Although they can run freely in all directions, as a family they lead concealed lives. There are upward of twenty-four British species: some live in rocks and crannies on the seashore or under stones; in moss or hotbeds; others in herbage upon the ground, while yet others occur in houses as in the above instance. When aroused or alarmed they hold up their pinchers in a threatening manner.

Their food consists of minute insects, mites, etc., which they meet with in their various haunts, and although commonly distributed they are as a rule not easily found owing to their very small size and retiring habits. In the case under notice, it happened that the late summer weather was unusually warm and therefore favourable to the production of insects in general, when suddenly the temperature dropped, causing them to go into hibernation together with their ‘hangers-on.’

So, as the prospect of spring-cleaning draws near - depressing thought! - may I reassure those involved that should a similar experience befall them in the process, there is nothing sinister about the presence of chelifers and no greater danger to health than what is associated with the flies themselves.

As to the meaning and purpose of the chelifers as queried by my informant, the reasons is still not well understood, though in the light of our present knowledge, strong evidence points to that of transport, namely, that chelifers, having exhausted the food supply, attach themselves to host insects in the hope of being carried to pastures new, a plan which as so often happens in the insect world, was not to be realised. And so it turned out that in vain they had thumbed a lift!

#### **PERDIX PERPLEXED** (8 March)

It was no surprise to hear the welcome saw-sharpening spring song of the great tit in the middle of Ringwood on such a mild sunny morning as 14 January, but the fact that an ouzel cock chose to perform a roundelay in my garden during the late afternoon of 13 February was a surprise, not on account of the early date, but because the thermometer was registering 39°F., with a sharp frost on the way.

In between these dates, a tour round the garden revealed by their runs and ‘tumps’ what agreeable hunting the moles were having in countryside and garden alike in the absence of a frost-bound earth, conditions which also appeared to reward the large number of lapwings in the Downton area, seasonal visitors from the uplands who would soon disperse to their breeding grounds.

However, come what may, the call notes of the common partridge were to be heard before St. Valentine’s Day, the traditional if fanciful date of the wild birds’ wooing. A ground-nesting bird, the partridge often chooses a hedgebank for its nest and too often a road hedge at that, which proves to be a rewarding hunting ground for predators too numerous to mention here. Again, if a good hatch is brought off and the chicks, a few days old, are running with their parents in the hayfields and a heavy thunder shower drenches the standing grass, the little birds, unless they can get into the sunshine to dry themselves, will die of pneumonia in the soaking herbage.

Then, sporadic poaching apart - for that is another story - the few that survive the guns later on are, it seems, subject to yet another kind of hazard. This was apparent when some time ago I was wheeling my bicycle up Crown Hill and heard the whirr of partridge feathers from over a hedge. Almost immediately there was an ominous twang as the leader of the pair struck the overhead power cable and hurtled with a thud at my feet.

Yes, this gallant little game bird lives in a dangerous world, and whether because of this or that, some enlightened authorities gave it the name of *Perdix perdix*. Can you wonder at the bird's look of perplexity?

### **EASTER BY THE WILDBROOK (29 March)**

Under a pale sky on a shining morning in early March I noticed that flower of the air, a Brimstone butterfly seeking the young year's nectar in a Ringwood garden. It was the first butterfly that I had seen to emerge from its winter quarters. In such a vernal accord as this, one is led to expect that Winter is over and the stage is set ready for the panorama of Spring. Then came the transformation. The blustering March winds held sway, sweeping the countryside at times with hurricane force and torrential rains that left the lower lands awash, while a flurry of snow from leaden skies powdered the earth. Even the ringing notes of the mistle thrush were stilled by the elements, and the Brimstone would return to its evergreen place of hibernation.

Later in the month, when the tempests abated and the cold air relented, I visited the wildbrook that flows in a nearby valley. The strengthening sun was already warming field and hedgerow, where, on nearing the wildbrook, early blossoms of dandelion, coltsfoot, and an array of golden gorse, besides peacock and comma butterflies were there to gladden thoughts of another Spring's joyous awakening. Over the banks of the river hung the ripening hazel tassels with the tiny scarlet tufts at the tips of the infant buds. The alder, too, was there, though not at its sublime best, when its curtain of tassels and cones gives a breath-taking vision of some pendants of precious tapestry. Also a party of sprightly siskins searched the ground for seeds before heading North for their breeding grounds.

My day was made by the discovery of that unusual and fascinating little plant, the lungwort, with its purple and blue flowers fully out and its curiously-spotted leaves from which it gets its name. It was the one colourful offering in a world of green and gold. I look forward to going back to the wildbrook where the phantom larva lurks and the old lady patrols the drowsy stream on silent wings at the dusk of a high Summer's night.

### **FICKLE APRIL (12 April)**

On old country calendars April was pictured as a young man dressed in green. Over one shoulder was a garland of myrtle and hawthorn in bud, and his right hand held a bunch of violets and roses. In April the cloud shadows chase each other across the hillsides, the high-pitched bubbling trill of the curlew is heard about the New Forest, the wheatear restlessly flits from stone to stone warbling its pleasant song on its heaths, and sand martins come home to the steep face of their nesting holes in the quarries around its boundaries. In April, too, the myriad white blossoms of the blackthorn delight the eye like shining snow against the black of the stems along the hedgeside, where the purple-tinged foliage of the earlier red dead-nettle is now joined by the more ornamental greater stitchwort or satin-flower.

The woodlands now are full of interest. The emerald of the larches arrests the eye: it is the freshest green of all. In Britain we experience nothing like the sudden Spring of the northern lands. With us Winter is long a-dying and its successor's travail is often wearily slow, as I was reminded when watching a blackbird feeding on ivy berries - surely the last alluring morsels of the wild-berry season.

A more colourful sign of Spring this month is the deep orange, marbled with black spots, on the underside and throat of a newt I saw, with a pale blue band along the base of its tail. There are three species of newt in Britain, and this particular one was a male common newt in the gaudy colouration of its breeding attire.

### **EXULTANT SWIFTS (26 April)**

As April passes into May those aerial masters, the swifts, will be seen as they dash about with abandon over Ringwood, a reminder that the rising tide of migrant birds from overseas, apart from a few later species, is almost over. In a very restricted locality of a neighbouring county - and therefore easily observed - 5 May is known as 'swift day', for they arrive there on that very date, year after year. One wonders, by the way, whether Ringwood will ever again be visited by that extreme rarity, the needle-tailed swift, a specimen, one of two seen, being killed there, according to the records, in 1879. We can trust that, nowadays, should another appear it would escape such a fate.

About mid-April, the first purely woodland butterfly to hatch out will appear in the New Forest and elsewhere. This is the pearl-bordered fritillary, eggs of which were laid on the dog violet plant last May-June, and on which the larvae will have fed before overwintering. Of medium size, with a rich fulvous ground-colour, black markings, and light fulvous underside, it has a short life of some four weeks before being succeeded in June by its not-so-common (in the South) and rather smaller cousin, the small pearl-bordered fritillary, with upperside resembling the former, but with a series of silver spots adding great beauty to the underside.

Another butterfly, double brooded in this case, now on the wing is the holly blue, strongly associated with holly and ivy, its normal food plants in due season: it is the earliest of the blues, being a more or less lilac-tinged delicate light blue with an underside of pale silvery blue, speckled with a few black spots.

Lastly, this month, the hedgebanks and flowery waysides will be adorned by that charming little butterfly, the orange-tip. The male is whitish and carries an orange-coloured patch on the forewings. The female, which comes out a little later to deposit its eggs on the cuckoo flower or lady's smock, is similar but lacks the orange patch, and on the wing might be mistaken for the small white cabbage butterfly, also possibly appearing now. The hindwing of the undersides of the orange-tip are beautifully tassellated with lemon and black scales producing a colour of ochreous green.

### **BLYTHE MAY (10 May)**

During May the pageant of Spring attains its perfection. No other month sparkles with colours so exquisitely fresh, so tender: it is the season when nature renews her life, when trees burst into leaf and blossom and the woods assume every shade of untarnished green. The fronds of fern and bracken are unfolding, and on the moorland the scent of moist peat rises like incense in the evening air.

May is truly the month of bluebells. Bluebells! They breathe music, they have the colour of mystery, of romance: far horizons and distant hills, both are the misty, magical hue of the woodland bluebell. See them in that larch wood standing on the side of a hill; sunlight sifting through the tasselled jade of the trees, soft brown carpet of leaves underfoot, and the last pale primroses gleaming like the moon at dawning by the mossy tree-boles. Here is the heart of beauty.

It is pretty to see the first pair of house martins return. In the centre of Ringwood a pair or two will be skimming over the roofs of the houses, darting up to their old comer under the eaves where the remnant of last year's mud nest still hangs, but it is 'home', and for a few instants they cling, twittering, side by side, then dropping off they circle quickly round the place, every minute or two returning to the scrap of a nest to exchange congratulations once more.

In the river meadows of the Avon Valley, the redshanks three-fold call, 'to, to, ee', is easily recognised. Close to, the red colour of their legs and the white of the lower back and rump and the wide white borders of the wings themselves make them easy to identify. Redshanks are very noisy. When one is

put up from the feeding grounds its call arouses the others and for some time the air throbs with the notes as bird after bird flies around. It is true that besides posts and fences, the redshank will occasionally perch on buildings, but to see one silhouetted against the sky as it stood on the parapet at the back of the Ringwood cinema was indeed a sight to remember.

During the warm days of mid-April, cuckoo, swallow, and willow warbler were all in the neighbourhood of Ringwood, though I did not hear the tender sweetness of the latter's song until the 22nd.

The higher temperatures at this time brought out that twinkling butterfly the speckled wood rather earlier than usual. Of a dusky-brown ground colour with pale yellow spots, it has been described as a shade-loving insect of woodland paths and shady lanes, yet nowadays, given a fine Summer, it can be seen basking in the hottest sunshine on the bare earth. Evolution might possibly be at work here, who knows?

#### CLIMAX OF SONG (24 May)

At this season when the whole countryside rings with the joyous notes of the dawn chorus, it is hard to pin one's preference for any one of the chief choristers in Nature's orchestra. This year, certain examples seem to have risen to such avian excellence as to arrest one's special attention: the agreeable cadence of the willow warbler surely standing out alone as the piccolo solo in the orchestra of bird music: the mellow notes of the blackcap as he flits like a butterfly rather than a bird among the milk-white bloom of the hawthorn garlanding our hedgerows, he sings, raising the feathers of his black crest in ecstasy.

And yet bird songs to some may appeal the more when softened by distance. Distance, to quote the old adage, lends enchantment, and a delightful example of this is to hear the clear musical liquid notes of the woodlark as he sails, a mere speck in a cloudless sky, over Gorley and along the Ogdens Vale, his torrent of fluty 'lu-lu-lus' ever more softened by distance until only a murmur is heard as he melts into the blue beyond, a charm denied those who are outside his widely-separated haunts.

The chilly days of late April and early May held back insect life, and butterflies were loath to appear, while a drowsy queen wasp was only moved to crawl about my bedroom on the 29th, and a jet black St. Mark's fly, resting on a nettle leaf down the lane, was - despite the alteration in the calendar - long overdue according to that saint's day.

Now, however, these smaller beings are responding to the warmer weather - half May, half June - and many a creature is spreading its wings, notably that remarkable insect the narrow-bordered bee hawk moth at flowers of the bugle in certain rides of the New Forest. Resembling a large bumble bee, it is remarkable for losing its wing-scales after the moth's first flight, when the wings then become transparent.

Meantime, in a nearby woodland, the last of the leaf warblers, the wood warbler has arrived to utter its repetition of a single note at increasing speed and ending in a tremulous trill.

#### PIPES OF PAN (7 June)

The month of June surely brings the peak of Nature's bounty to be seen and heard and felt by those who are capable of appreciating it. This is the month for roses: they are everywhere out in their splendour, but down the lane, topping hedgebanks of lowly mouse-eared hawk-weed, jack-by-the-hedge, red clover, comfrey, sorrel, and rampant with stitchwort and fern are the sweetest of all - the pink and white dog-roses with petals of finest silk!

Many young birds are now on the wing, among them blackbirds, thrushes, starlings, greenfinches, and sparrows. Notice how the plumage of the youngsters differs from that of their parents, and the similarity of the young spotted robin to the young spotted thrush, often a cause of mistaken identity by those who see the respective infants for the first time.

Meanwhile the turtle dove's crooning is heard round about. The faithful spotted flycatchers from Africa have been taking a bath in my garden, and the nightingales continue their rival roundelays in the New Forest as only these birds in close proximity can; alas, when the young are hatched - about 10 June if all goes well - the outpouring will be reduced to a frog-like croak, since your philomel will be far too busy attending to the needs of the young. All that is except the green woodpecker, which I have not so far seen, and the kingfisher, which seems to be less noticeable, the pert little wren, however, had evidently regained its numbers, of old, its bold, clear and powerful song for such a minute bird being a welcome revival about the garden, while the long-tailed tit, that charming, delicate sprite of the hedgerow thickets, another of the near-vanished species, has reappeared sparingly.

Fitful sunshine has tempted the green-veined white and the small white butterflies on the wing. Almost identical when seen, they have the big difference that while the larvae of the former are harmless to cultivated plants, those of the latter, to some extent with its cousin the white, can, in a favourable season, be a positive menace to garden brassica plants.

Towards evening the striking crimson and black and grey wings of the cinnabar moth may be seen idly fluttering around, and later on, its black- and yellow-ringed larvae will be found on the ragwort food plants in the fields.

#### ROAMING THE NEW FOREST HEATHLANDS (28 June)

Journeying through the southern tip of the Forest, on to a point north of Stoney Cross, a bird watcher's thrill awaited me. This was the unexpected appearance of that fine, rare hawk, the male hen harrier, which passed almost over my head and at no great height. Except for its long wings and tail, it resembled a large white gull as, with steady wing-beats, it headed in the direction of Bramshaw.

Next, a ramble to nearby Canterton Glen, and the sight of the agile form of that restless Spring visitor, the redstart, darting for insects, though never far away and always with that quivering up-and-down motion of the rufous tail, so characteristic of this species.

Around Holmsley, the carrying power of the tree-pipit's sweet song could be heard from afar; one of our Spring migrants who, in my experience, takes the precaution, when feeding the young, to alight some twenty yards from the nest and walk stealthily up to it.

In the enclosure itself, three kinds of those structurally moth-like little butterflies, the skippers, with rapid, direct, buzzing flight were on the wing, though periods of sunshine tempted them to sunbathe on the warm, stony tracks. A peep at the water splash revealed those intriguing aquatic surface dwellers the pond skaters, ever darting over the water's surface, with forelegs held above the water for seizing, middle legs for propelling and hind legs for steering, no doubt full of the joys of the liquid plain.

#### SPINDLE AND PINE (2 August)

The children found it down the quiet lane and what an attraction it proved to be. The lane, narrow and bordered by 5'-high banks with an elm tree or two on either side, and once a smugglers' way, is now but seldom used except for the passage of farm vehicles in a scattered rural community. For a stretch

of ten yards along this bank the entire herbage was covered by a communal tent of the finest silk, perfectly woven in its entirety with nothing left undone to endanger the lives of the dwellers therein. Such a sight had never been seen down the lane before that I knew of. Juvenile guesses differed only on the fearsome aspect of the outsize spider that was felt to be responsible. Peering into the tent, a score of little white pupae could be seen spun up to the plants, and many others must have been, as it turned out, hidden from view.

Within a week or so of the children's discovery the proximity became alive with a vast number - not of spiders - but of very small moths with a wing spread of a mere 23 mms. With white fore-wings specked with black and brownish hindwings with light fringes they are commonly known as small ermine moths. Meanwhile, the tent, wilting under the stress of events, was no longer flawless: it had served its purpose.

Many are aware of the spindle tree being host to the bean aphid or 'black fly', but the fact that it can also attract and provide for the larvae of small ermine moths seems less well known and, need I add that not a leaf escaped destruction on the nearest spindle to the tent.

It was this moth's larger namesake, the white ermine, that drifted in on snowy wings to encircle the night nurse, providing a bright interlude during her long vigil in a ward in Salisbury Hospital where I happened to be a patient at the time.

The larvae of other kinds of predators can, of course, play havoc with the foliage of trees and shrubs, an example of which confronted me on being shown a denuded conifer on a building site in the grounds of Avon Castle. This tree, too, had been stripped bare of its needles by larvae of the pine saw-fly, one of the cousins of the more familiar gooseberry saw-fly of the fruit garden, and others of the tribe whose females literally saw slits or pockets in which to place their eggs in the plants upon which the larvae will feed.

#### **A BIRD AT ITS BEST** (16 August)

With the passage of Summer the last of the season's young finches have flown from my garden. But the goldfinch family, with their lively twittering and bright appearance, seemed loath to utter a farewell twitter to their nesting place of yesteryear. The chosen site was, as usual, a cluster pine, with its spreading boughs stretching away for many yards around, and almost within its shadow a small rockery topped by a bird bath and a wayward cornflower plant which flourished to seed lavishly nearby. Nothing could have suited the family better. As the parents took their seeds and their sips the crimson masks of one or the other were always in evidence, so as they flitted to and fro to the sanctuaries, the gold-banded wings on a background of buff and black caught the sun's rays. Now, these most dainty and alluring of finches have moved away to the thistles and other seeds, no doubt to be joined by others of their kind to re-affirm that delightful old term 'a charm of goldfinches.' Nowadays, happily, they are free from the bird catchers' snares of my school days.

Standing by the edge of a stream in the middle of the New Forest enclosure, I watched a water vole plop into the water almost at my feet. It swam apparently with all four legs, its chubby head held well above the surface. Reaching the other side it paused to nibble some leaves of overhanging ivy before vanishing from sight. Just then, a very different creature was seen to be approaching upstream, more nearly resembling a worm than a fish with its methodical slow rolling action. Its exact identity was puzzling, so that when it came within reach I leaned over and whisked it on to the bank. A mere four inches long, of yellowish hues and swanquill girth, it revealed itself to be a young form of the lampem, also known as the pride or brook lamprey. It was interesting to note that it possessed the smooth

sacleless body common to the larger lamprey, as well as the disk instead of a mouth by which they can attach themselves to various objects, also the seven gill-openings on each side; but to see its calm unhurried progress upstream amid such a deep woodland setting was, I felt, quite unexpected.

### **PIRATE MOTH** (13 September)

This is the month for the appearance of the large hawk moths, but pressure on space allows only the mention of one, the largest - in bulk if not in wing span - the awe-inspiring death's head hawk moth. In the British Isles, its numbers vary in different years for it is most certainly a migratory species. With forewings of various shades of velvety brown, black, and ochreous, and hindwings of deep orange with two transverse black bands across them, it carries on the thorax a skull and crossbones in true pirate fashion.

Never a common species, it is, if found at all, usually in the pupal state and turned up in potato fields, the leaves of which are its food. Occasionally, migratory irruptions occur. One of these was in 1956, and was of such a scale that the moth was reported in all kinds of places from Cornwall to the Orkneys. Not only is the moth able to emit a mouse-like squeak, but so in variable degree can the larva and pupa. Such is the attraction of the pupa, that a number of small boys brought me a specimen for confirmation. "What are you going to do with it?" I asked. "Breed death's head moths and start a farm," piped up one of them. How like a boy! By the look of the unfortunate pupa, it was clear that it had suffered from an overdose of inspection and its chances of survival were accordingly remote, so it is hardly surprising that a new enterprise has not emerged to add to Ringwood's industries.

Now toadstool time is with us, or rather the more conspicuous fungi season, for the tribe as a whole obtain throughout the year. A particularly unsavoury species has appeared on a bankside of the garden. This, a stinkhorn fungus, was marked by the presence of an assortment of flesh flies in such numbers that a solid mass had formed, covering the stem and cap. A disturbing feature was that all the flies were discoloured, ranging from ashy to white. Most of them were dead, others comatose; none was able to move, let alone fly off.

Microscopic examination showed that the flies were infected by a white parasitic fungus of the empusa group, known as fly cholera. Evil as a decomposing stinkhorn is, I have no doubt that the flies contracted the disease before they landed on the stinkhorn, that they died more quickly than usual when entangled on the stinkhorn mucus with the fungus spores within them, which would be dispersed unharmed.

### **SEPTEMBER'S SAINTS** (27 September)

Old country folk, who are - or were - fond of quoting proverbs and rhymes in which country lore is enshrined, spoke of September, "St. Matthew bids goodbye to the Summer and St. Maurice shuts the door after him." St. Matthew's Day falls on the 21st, and St. Maurice's on the day after. Although the tide of Summer is at the turn, September is often a lovely month, quiet, peaceful, and golden, but the fuy of the gale in the first week so upset the quietude that one imagines even St. Francis, who referred to the wind as his brother, would have had mixed feelings on finding the spate of apples from the old Wellington tree, which, when picked normally and well kept, can be reckoned to last till apples come again.

Among the first early signs of Autumn's approach was the loud ringing 'pee pee pee' of the nuthatch, reminding us that he had recovered his voice. September is the month of ripened fruit and shining berries; hedgerows sport the honeysuckle blooms afresh and with fragrance. What a versatile shrub it is, displaying the scarlet berries of an earlier, summer flowering and, in addition, being the sole plant

food of the white admiral butterfly. Judging by the number of seekers around, the bramble fruit has been well sought out, but the sloes, as usual these days, were generally disregarded, as indeed was that red admiral basking on a sunny gatepost and a not-often-encountered but beautiful little butterfly the purple hairstreak, a specimen of which rose languidly from the dewy grass.

The southern-bound tide of bird migration has passed its peak: in early July, whether from the impressive countryside of Yorkshire or across Cheshire's Wirral Peninsular, the first to move on south were the young wagtails and warblers who would follow the narrow flight lines as did their forebears. So it was not surprising to see, at the end of August, a wheatear hedge-hopping along a country lane leading to Bransgore and the coast. As I watched this little bird I could only wish it all the luck in the world, half of which it will need to have to cross, may be as far as the Gulf of Guinea before it returned to the shores of its homeland, the lanes and downs of its old familiar birthplace.

### **OCTOBER'S CHANGES (11 October)**

October is the month of great changes. Almost daily the squadrons of wild geese that swing across the sky on the east coast are reinforced by new arrivals. Great hosts of the crow tribe come streaming in, and the stubble in the field is thronged by new companies of foreign skylarks that drift aimlessly from field to field filling the air with the silvery twitter of their call notes. House martins round the eaves have dwindled to the few pairs which still have young to feed. October is the month which one day brings from Scandinavia wandering companies of redwings and fieldfares, and next day belated flycatchers, whinchats, wheatears, and redstarts among others, halting for a while to catch flies in the sunny shelter of our hedges.

In distant days, the advent of October was the signal for another kind of change. Usually on the first of the month there would be a visit, with sometimes a trudge of miles, from villages to the market town by the farm labourers I knew as a boy. The main purpose of the occasion was to obtain heavy hobnailed boots for the Winter, while at the long-established outfitters were other things to be decided upon according to the means at the time. The day was then sealed in traditional style at the favourite rendezvous where memories and topics were discussed, aided and abetted by a special seasonal brew known, I believe, as 'Dark October', the potent effects of which were only too manifest in the curious distortions of footfall and speech heard on the way home in the night air.

The harvest moon has waxed and waned, and the change to damp overcast nights has brought a number of late summer moths to lighted window panes, for though they shun moonlight excursions, artificial light acts as a magnet in attracting them, whether indoors or out. They are thus attracted not by controlled choice of action but by certain factors in their construction which combine to upset their stability when in an artificial light zone, leading to erratic wing control which, in turn, accounts for their wild circuits of the electric light bulb indoors. In other words, they are led astray, being helpless to avoid staging the exhibitions they sometimes do. As I write, dashing at the light in the kitchen, is specimen of the silver Y or gamma moth, which by the way, is also a day-flying species and one of our commonest moths. It gets its name from the Y-shaped marking in the middle of the fore wings on a ground colour ranging from greyish to deep purplish brown. It is a migratory insect, and, seldom having a bad season, is generally widespread over the British Isles.

### **AFTER THE BUTTERFLIES' BALL (25 October)**

The butterfly season has drawn to its close. Of the 68 species on the British list, seven hibernate as adults, of which the peacock and small tortoiseshell often find their way indoors to discover some dark cranny in which to pass the Winter. By the way, they should be carefully transferred to an unheated room or outhouse, because the reason they have come indoors is not for warmth but to shelter in a

darkened corner. The other five hibernates, of which the rare Camberwell beauty is a migrant, spend the Winter concealed in a tree or bush. The remainder of the species are already firmly overwintering either in egg, larval, or pupal stage, according to the species.

What has happened to our garden butterflies - and maybe other butterflies, too? In addition to man's fateful actions with herbicides, the modern interferences with wild life, and the present-day passion for shaving the roadside verges of wild flowers and grasses, there is also the fact of climatic conditions.

If the old saying that one swallow does not make a Summer could be reversed into that of one Summer does not make a butterfly, we get nearer to what might have been and continues to be a guiding factor in butterfly population as a whole. There is built-up evidence, at least in the south, that a succession of open Winters, causing as they do certain fungal diseases to kill off hibernating larvae, followed by sunless Summers means that such butterflies as do emerge from the surviving larvae will not deposit eggs unless the weather is bright and sunny. So it can be said to take not one but two or more fine Summers in succession, with periods of wintry conditions between, to enrich in some measure the butterfly world.

### **SEASON OF MISTS AND MAGIC (8 November)**

The time of wonder and witchery, of loveliness newly revealed: November is the month of vivid sunsets, star-galaxies, of mist and magic, mist that may be white as sea foam, blue as a drift of woodland bluebells, or purple as the lavender, mist that softens the contours of the distant hills and fills the valleys with mystery. Colour is everywhere in country lanes and fields: a bramble flaunts its banner of crimson leaves, an oak gleams bright with gold and orange in the low light of a November sunset, the scarlet berries on the holly bushes and a trail of bryony's vivid jewel-like seed vessels bring a gay reminder of departed Summer.

The tits are very much back in our gardens, foraging in small parties, exploring window frames and gutters from every angle and posture, and with the perky look of one who is credited with a diet of 78% injurious insects, which his beady eyes detect though far out of sight to human eyes.

Pied wagtails, so well known as dish- or polly-washers, having migrated from the more northern to the southern parts of the kingdom, may be seen about the farmyard or even running rapidly along the tiles or thatch of a country house: the smallest garden lawns are sometimes adorned by their slim figures and graceful movements. With much less insect food for the chasing at this time of the year, wagtails need to turn to a more varied diet of seeds, grabs from upturned ploughlands, and from the water's edge.

Now can be heard a real November sound, one invested with a kind of sanctity beyond all others, for the robin children have donned their red waistcoats, and their subdued trills and warbles are heard along the lanes and hedgerows: the family song is one of November's gifts to the listener in town or country gardens.

### **PILGRIMAGE IN DECEMBER (27 December)**

Although December daylight, subdued as moonshine is to sunlight, softens the drowsy countryside, bright winter days may intervene when the sun shines out of a perfect virgin-blue sky and the distant part of the landscape looms strangely near. On such a day, take a pilgrimage to a wood, and, once there, search until you find the hidden beauties of Winter.

What prettier sight, for instance, than a surprised jay, slipping out of an oak or beech tree on your approach, its predominating pinkish-brown plumage and wing patch of black, white, and bright blue bars outstanding for the moment among the mellowing tints of the still hanging leaves. A holly tree standing in full sunshine on the boundary of the wood, bright with the marriage of gleaming red berries and polished green leaves, strikes a contrast with the amber-tinged straw-like stalks of the now sombre bracken lining the bank behind.

December, curiously enough, is a month favoured by the barn or white owl for hunting in broad daylight. Much scarcer than formerly but still existing locally, this legendary bodeful bird might be seen flapping and gliding silently along the hedge banks of its haunts. I have even seen it doing this over pond-side rushes at this time of the year.

To escape from the rattle and roar of main road traffic, I turned into a lane leading to the New Forest. There, perched on a twig of a roadside bush, was a small chestnut-breasted bird, its blackish-brown head (not jet black as in Summer) with white neck patch at once distinguished it as a cock stonechat. A resident and local species in one sense, it is subject to widespread movements in Britain, so that individuals seen in some areas in other seasons are unlikely to be those that bred there in the Spring. Passing on to the Knaves Ash locality, a party of those fascinating finches, the crossbills, were busily engaged in extracting conifer seeds by the joint action of beak and tongue, and clinging to branches and twigs in all sorts of positions, a habit which, added to their gaudy red-and-green plumage, approaches that of the parrots.

Except for the odd white and red dead nettles, there was little to catch the eye, and the wild floral season seemed at an end. But not quite. A tour round the arable lands revealed an autumnal display of the corn marigold's bright yellow flowers in abundance - a showy finale.

## COLONEL FERDINAND ST JOHN'S PAPERS

[Readers of *Report* may remember the regret of the Editor that there had been no success in tracing the papers belonging to Colonel Ferdinand St. John (1861-1930). In 1925 he provided *The Sir Walter St. John's Magazine* and *The Times* newspaper with copies of the letter that his great-uncle Joseph Henry St. John had written immediately after the battle of Waterloo. Colonel St. John had written to *The Times* and to several magazines that he had six or seven of Joseph's letters and hoped to have them published. The only journal, in fact, that printed the letters - in a slightly abbreviated form and with one small omission - was *The Household Brigade Magazine* (Summer 1925) 184-9. (The one omission was the paragraph in Joseph's letter of 31 March which described some of the Guards as being drunk and incapable.)

In 1924 Colonel St. John married Zulmée Marie Thérèse Lesoing, daughter of the late Théophile Lesoing of Avesnes-le-Comte. At his death his papers and other St. John memorabilia, particularly items that had belonged to his father Canon St. John (d. 1914), were put away in boxes. The boxes were inherited and opened last autumn by the Colonel's step-grandson, Peter Lesoing, whom we are delighted to welcome as a member of the Friends of Lydiard Tregoz.

Peter has most generously made his grandfather's papers available to the Friends. A number of them appear here, collected together under the following headings:

1 a selection from the extensive autobiographical notes which Colonel St. John hoped to have published in book form,

2 information about Henry Joseph St. John,

3 a note of those letters, of which Colonel St. John had copies, which have already been transcribed in 'St. John Papers,'

4 copies of two letters and a fragment by Joseph Henry St. John which were not included in 'St. John Papers - 3.']

### 1 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NOTES BY COLONEL ST JOHN

My father was a country parson, but, as my grandfather the Hon. Ferdinand St. John was a diplomat, my father and his three brothers Harry, Charles, and Frederick, were all born at Florence and they could speak English, French, German, and Italian with equal fluency and pureness of accent. My mother was a daughter of John Dalyell of Lingo, Fife, a famous MFH.

I was born on St. Crispin's Day 1861 - the anniversary of Agincourt and Balaclava - at Frampton-on-Severn, a rather remote village as the nearest telegraph office then was 10 miles away at Gloucester. The charge for delivery of a telegram was 1s. per mile by a mounted messenger. I remember a story of a hunting man sending a telegram to a brother sportsman, saying, "We had a wonderful run. I was in at the death with one other." For this, the recipient had to pay 10s. He had his revenge by replying, "Who was the other?" for which he well knew that his friend would have to pay 15s.

The period of my childhood was before lawn tennis was invented. Instead there were croquet and archery parties to which we went as all the neighbours were fast friends of my parents. There were the Darells at Frethame Court, the Barwick Lloyds of Hardwick Court, the Gambier Parrys of Highnam Court, the FitzHardinges of Berkeley Castle. Herbert Gambier Parry, the composer, was a great ally of my musical mother, as was Mrs Ellicott, wife of the Bishop of Gloucester, who sang beautifully and had distinguished musicians to stay at the Palace, whom she brought to sing at the village choir concerts got up by my brother. Once she brought Sir Joseph Bamby to conduct a programme which included one of his own compositions, 'Sweet and Low.'



*Canon and Mrs St. John.*

## **HOLIDAYS**

In my boyhood I think people showed much greater hospitality than nowadays. As a family we were invited every year to spend months with cousins and friends.

My first visit which I remember was to Sir Percy and Lady Shelley, and I have never forgotten it because it was the first time that I saw the sea and enjoyed sea bathing. I have stayed with them many times since then. Sir Percy was the son of the poet, and he married the widow of my father's uncle. They had a property in Field Place, Sussex, but for Sir Percy's health they bought Boscombe manor with about 200 acres of pine woods on the sea front, which afterwards brought a fortune when Boscombe was no longer a tiny village. Sir Percy had a steam yacht and a passion for theatricals. He built a theatre at Boscombe, also one close to Shelley House on the Chelsea Embankment, and always insisted on playing the principal part himself although he couldn't act 'for nuts'. When we stayed there in my childhood. Sir Percy was mad on bicycles - the old wooden ones - with iron tyres. The Shelleys had no children, but adopted Lady Shelley's beautiful niece, who married Colonel Scarlett of the Scots Guards. Their eldest son Shelley Scarlett, Lord Abinger, became a great ally of mine in later life and a most amusing companion.

The most delightful visit I had as a child was to our cousins the Campbells of Stonefield on Loch Fyne. Stonefield has ever been my ideal of a delightful place. The scenery is perfectly lovely, with gardens and walks alongside Loch Fyne, two miles of private drive to the lodge gates, a glen with a beautiful burn full of trout and a waterfall, woods overhanging the loch, and hills covered with heather and well stocked with grouse. There was yachting, fishing, and bathing in the Loch Fyne. What could be a more perfect place for a boy! Whilst we were staying there the Duke of Argyll's yacht got stranded on a rock on its way to the Isle of Arran. The whole party, which included the Duke, the Marquess of Lome who married HRH Princess Louise, and Lord Colin Campbell, joined the house party at Stonefield.

In 1870 we went to stay at Hintlesham Hall with my mother's uncle the late Colonel Hamilton Lloyd Anstruther, who started the Felixtowe golf links, some of the first in England after Blackheath. Hintlesham was a delightful place in Suffolk, and I had a good time fishing and boating on the ponds. We were all excited over the Franco-Prussian War and used to make lint for the wounded. My sympathies were first with Prussia because my grandmother was a great friend of the King of Prussia, but afterwards I became entirely pro-French as nearly everyone sympathised with the weaker side.

In 1871 we spent some time with our cousins Sir Alexander and Lady Kinloch in their St. Andrews house where I first played golf. My uncle Robert gave me some of his old clubs to start with, and the old caddie who instructed me - looking at an ancient iron - asked, 'Did this ir-r-r-ron come 'oot of the 'arrrk?' (I once did the 8th hole at St. Andrews in one - never again have I had this luck!) Afterwards we stayed at my uncle Sir Robert Dalrymple's house at Lingo, Fife, where I hunted rabbits with a dog. I pretended that the rabbit was a fox, the Scotch terrier a pack of hounds, and myself a MFH. We also went to stay with my mother's cousins, Sir Robert and Lady Anstruther at Balcaskie. I played with their four sons, Ralph (now baronet), Harry (later Liberal Whip), Robert (now an Admiral), and Arthur.

On our return from the North we had a visit from Lady Isabella St. John, widow of my father's uncle Joseph St. John and daughter of the 4th Duke of Grafton. With her was her daughter Antonia, who was afterwards the best friend I ever had.

## **HUNTING**

In Gloucestershire we lived in hunting country, and in those days the Grands Seigneurs, who were MFHs, took no subscriptions and hunted the country 5 or 6 days a week. We were in the Berkeley country (Lord Fitzhardinge) and the nearest other pack was the Duke of Beaufort's. Of Lord Fitzhardinge - "the Giant" as he was called - there are many stories told elsewhere. He was a great character. In politics, he described himself as "yalla", which was the colour of the Liberals. His tenants were obliged to serve in the Gloucestershire Yeomanry and to vote "yalla." An unfortunate tenant farmer who ventured to vote "blue" was set upon by some of the others, who found themselves as a result in Gloucester gaol. When they came out of prison Lord Fitzhardinge ordered the church bells to be rung and an escort of the Royal Gloucestershire Hussars to return with them to Berkeley. His lordship, however, became a Tory when the Hares & Rabbits Bill came in.

My father, although a parson, was fond of all sorts of sport and my mother was the daughter of a MFH so that I was brought up to look upon fox hunting as one of the most important things in life.

I hunted first on a donkey, and then on a pony. When I was 7 years old the Giant (Lord Fitzhardinge) gave me my first hunting crop and pair of spurs. My father did not like me at that early age to hunt all alone, and he made that an excuse to ride his cob and look after me and see the hounds at the same time.

I remember once he drove my sister to the meet at Fretherne Court. I followed on my pony. On our arrival my father put up the pony cart at the Squire's - Sir Lionel Darrell's - stables, and took out his

saddle and bridle which he had hidden under the seat so as to look after me and leave my sister with our kind hosts to follow hounds on foot. Lord Fitzhardinge happened to see this performance which caused him intense amusement and he never forgot it ever afterwards. When he met my father driving, he would say in the Gloucestershire accent which he affected, "Revrend zurr thous got zaddle undurr zeent today?"

### **ENFANT TERRIBLE**

I believe I was a dreadful child, always overhearing and remembering what I was not intended to hear. Once I found there was a plan that one of my uncles should marry a young lady who was staying with us. I said nothing, but determined to help matters on. So one day, seeing them together, I said, "I say, uncle, why don't you marry Miss - -?" They both blushed, and my uncle said, "I don't suppose she would have anything to say to me." To which I replied, "My dear uncle you must be mad. She told me she was simply dying for you to propose." Miss - - soundly boxed my ears, and sent me out of the room. I fear my good intentions stopped a possibly happy marriage.

At that early age I was never backward in declaring my passion for a beautiful girl. There were two sisters who were the reigning beauties of Gloucestershire for whom I conceived a childish passion. I was telling one of them that she was the most beautiful girl in the world when she remembered that I had said the same thing to her sister. I replied, "When I see you, your sister seems like mud."

### **SCHOOL**

When the time came for me to go to school, I was fortunate enough to pass a music test set by Dr Stainer, afterwards organist at St.Paul's Cathedral, and became a choir boy in the famous Magdalen choir, which gave me a free education at Magdalen College School. It was due to the genius of Dr Stainer that the choir became the best in England and the delight of all Oxford. It is impossible to describe the effect on a boy brought for the first time under the influence of church music as it was rendered in the College Chapel.

Even at the age of ten I was able to appreciate the beauty of the College, the cloisters, the walks, and the grove. The College, being outside the walls of the city of Oxford, had its own walls of defence, behind the battlements of which we boys used to snowball policemen and other unoffending persons. Every night a chorister sat on a stool in the College Hall where he had to sing out, 'Gratiarum Actio', after which a long grace in Latin was said by a Demi. For this the chorister was rewarded with unlimited pudding and a glass of wine. Being shy by nature I used to sell my turn to another boy. On May 1st we sang a Latin hymn on the top of Magdalen tower at dawn and we could be heard over two miles away. I am sorry to hear that the delightful old music by Byrd has been superceded by a composition of the present organist.

I well remember Dean Lidell of Christchurch and his beautiful daughters, one of whom was the Alice in Dodgson's delightful book. When I was a chorister, amongst the 'demis' was Oscar Wilde, who afterwards became so famous as a playwright. He had long hair, and my friends and I used to call him the awful 'it', and made faces at him in chapel.

At school I was very keen on rowing, and, when sufficiently heavy, rowed bow in the 'four', and also won the 'Sculls.' There was also plenty of sailing, and in winter Rugby football, some hunting, and often skating. On whole holidays we used to hire ponies and ride to Blenheim

I was taken to London for a change of air after scarlatina by my uncle, the late Sir Frederick St.John, who was in the Diplomatic Service in China, Russia, South America, Constantinople, etc. He had just left Vienna [1872], where he was Secretary to the Embassy. He was the kindest of uncles. When in Vienna he did some service for Lord Randolph Churchill, who asked if he could do anything for him

in England. My uncle said, 'When you are at Blenheim, go and see my nephew Ferdinand at Magdalen School.' I little thought how afterwards I should be friends with his sons Winston and Jack Churchill.

## **FRANCE**

On leaving Magdalen School I was sent to Orléans to learn French, which I found of immense use in after life. I had never been abroad, and it was a great adventure. Some Russian friends of my family offered to put me up in Paris on my way, a Madame Smirnoff and her two daughters. They gave me the best of times in Paris. I was taken round the city by their nephew, Prince Troubetzkoi, the sights by day and the theatre every night. He also took me to the races, the first I had ever seen.

At Orléans I lived with a French family. I went every day to the Fycée as a day boy. We had a very hard winter, and there was excellent skating on parts of the Foire. I had fortunately learned all sorts of figure skating from Dr Tom Bird, one of the greatest experts of the Fondon Skating Club. The summer was superb, and my host took me for rides in the Forest of Orléans to watch the artillery practice with live shells.

Near Orleans is the Château de la Source, which was once a possession of my family, having been bought by Bolingbroke during his exile. There he lived with his second wife the Marquise de Villette, and at Fa Source he frequently entertained Voltaire. When I was at Orléans the Château was owned by Madame de Polignac who, hearing from friends in England that I was so near, invited me frequently to the Château. Fa Source is one of the loveliest spots in France, a small château facing Orléans, amid vineyards and 'terraces ornées.' I recently met the Princesse de Polignac - daughter of Madame la Comtesse - who married her cousin the Prince.

## **KEMPSFORD**

My father was soon after given another church living by the Bishop of Gloucester, Kempsford, near Fairford. The church is beautiful, and the vicarage gardens slope to the Thames where it divides Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. In the gardens are the ruins of a castle of the Dukes of Fancaster, with a walk with battlements along the ruin.

Kempsford was a delightful place with charming neighbours. I made friends with a good old hunting fanner, Hewer of the Manor Farm. He took me out rabbit shooting when not hunting. I was also shown great kindness by Sir Thomas Bazley of Hatherop Castle. He, who did not care for sport, told my brother and me that we could order his keepers whenever we wished to shoot or to fish the Colne, an excellent dry-fly trout stream. On the Colne I also had leave to fish from Mr Raymond Barker of Fairford Park. He, who was never known to give anyone a day's fishing, gave me general leave. I also had fishing from the late Ford Sherborne at Bibury and from the grandfather of 'Scatters Wilson' at Ablington.

My father found that, after paying a curate £200 a year, and if all the glebe farms were let, nothing was left. He therefore took some pupils to augment his income, and these included Harry Greville, a cousin of my aunt Mrs Dalyell, George Michell, Ford Marsham (now Ford Romney), Eustace Fiennes, and Sir Ralph Hare. They were a good lot and very nice to my family. I have seen much of them in after life.

I had a great wish to be a soldier, but my father could not give me a sufficient allowance for that. As I had to do something, I wanted something with the longest possible holidays. My elder brother was then a clerk in the House of Fords, where they had about five months holiday each year. The House of Commons had about six months, so, when Sir Robert Peel, who used to stay with us as a Harrow schoolboy and was then in the Government, asked me what I should like I told him my wish. He said, 'You shall have it,' and made a note of it. That is as far as it went.

In those days it was unusual for sons of good families to go into business. They became sailors, soldiers, clergymen, barristers, civil servants, or diplomats. Neither in my father's or in my mother's family had anyone ever been in business, which is a great disadvantage in some ways as one has not the tradition nor ambition to make money. I failed to get an interpretership at Constantinople, and my father did not succeed in getting me employment as a land agent.



*Colonel St. John as Hon. Lieut.-Col. The Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars*

## **TO LONDON AND WORK**

When I first went to London to work, it was as unpaid assistant private secretary to Colonel du Plat Taylor, who was Managing Director of the East & West India Dock Co. His wife, Mrs du Plat Taylor, was a cousin of mine. I was eventually obliged to go into the City as a clerk in an insurance company. The insurance world is one of the few places where clerks can rise to be general managers, some of whom make as much as £15,000 or £20,000 a year. To do this, one must have great business ability and untiring energy, neither of which I have the good fortune to possess.

I found it a great trial, after being accustomed to an open-air life and the country, to work in a City office from 9.30 a.m. to sometimes 9 or 10 o'clock at night, copying insurance policies and other drudgery.

My grandmother used to come every year to London to stay for a month with her friend the Grand Duchess of Mecklenberg-Strelitz at St James's Palace. The Grand Duchess was the sister of the Duke

of Cambridge and of the Duchess of Teck. I used to go and see my grandmother, and she took me to see Lady Holland at Holland House, who kindly invited me to come there whenever I wanted 'country air.'

A great change came at my City Office: a new General Manager was appointed who made things 'hum.' He found me pasting in papers one night in the office at 10 p.m. As a matter of fact I knew he would be there that night as it was the night before the General Meeting of the Company. I wished to bring myself to his notice. It worked all right. He said, "What are you working so late for?" I replied that I never left the office until I had finished my work. The result was a great change in the work of the office. We now got away at 4.30 instead of being kept until 9 p.m. by our seniors who liked working late in order to get a free supper at the expense of the office and, perhaps, to have an evening free from home worries. I was taken as confidential clerk to open the letters for the General Manager.

The General Manager told me he proposed starting a West End Branch, that I was too young to be Manager, but that he had a friend who would be appointed with whom he thought I should get on. The Branch Manager was indeed a very pleasant companion as I found when we started the new venture, and my life was a very different one.

His method of getting business was to entertain lavishly. Having some private means he drove about in a very small private hansom. Nearly every day he gave me a champagne luncheon at Epitanx - a restaurant now no more, which was in the Royal Opera Arcade. He saw at once that even if my business ability was not great I had what is called 'a good connection' and I had leave whenever I liked to stay in country houses if there was any chance of getting some insurance business. In this way I got a lot of business, and he had one or two good agents who brought an increasing amount of insurance for a time - the result of his lavish hospitality.

Soon after we started, and when the Branch Manager was very keen for new business, a plausible stranger called at the Office and said he had come up from Yorkshire to do some big insurances for a rich baronet to whom he was agent. My friend, who was overjoyed, took him to luncheon chez Epitanx and, in the course of their conversation, persuaded the soi-disant agent to transfer all the baronet's fire insurance besides a £50,000 life insurance. They became such pals that my friend had accepted an invitation to bring his wife to the alleged baronet's box at The Opera when suddenly the agent said, "My goodness, I must go and cash a cheque before I go back to Yorkshire tonight." My friend said, "My dear fellow, you are too late; it's 4 o'clock and the banks are shut. But, how much do you want? I can perhaps do it at the Office."

He duly cashed him a cheque for £20. When he told me the story, as a great stroke of luck, I suggested that I had never heard of a baronet of that name, and sure enough he did not appear in the 'Stud Book.' Some weeks later we saw in the paper that the plausible stranger had been given 5 years for doing the same thing and giving the same names to a bank manager. It appeared in the evidence that his victims were Solicitors, Insurance and Bank Managers, especially those newly started. A few years later I saw in the paper that he had recommenced his operations, giving exactly the same names and getting a further term of penal servitude.

The business having increased I got three of my friends into the Office who were all of great use in getting new business from their families and connections. First there was Arthur Legge, who shared rooms with me, then Herbert Stourton, who brought in his great friend Evelyn FitzGerald. The work of the Office was done by a very efficient and hardworking Chief Clerk. In his absence certain irregularities, I regret to say, went on. An important client called one day and found Herbert Stourton and Evelyn FitzGerald boxing in the Manager's room - which appeared somewhat unbusinesslike.

My friend S., the Branch Manager, was very shy with the fair sex, and his wife had asked him to engage a governess for their children. He advertised for a governess, giving the Office address. He commissioned me to interview them and left it to my choice. I decided on the prettiest and most fascinating of those whom I interviewed. Her previous employment had been in the chorus at the Gaiety Theatre. S. was delighted with my discrimination, and his boys simply loved her, but the new governess never really got on well with Mrs. S., and alas! they parted with her - I mean the governess.

## **SOCIAL LIFE**

First of all, I shared rooms in London with my brother who was much in society, and who got me invitations to many dances and entertainments. Young men who danced were at a premium for the great balls given during the London season, and once my name was on the lists of some of the principal hostesses, I was asked out every night, sometimes going to as many as three dances in a night. It was a curious contrast, sticking on stamps and drudging by day and supping at night amidst unlimited luxury. Unless it was pouring with rain we always walked back after our dances, arriving at perhaps 5 in the morning - to be up again at 7.30.

I remember balls at Spencer House, Portman House, Lady Willoughby d'Eresby's in Belgrave Square, Grosvenor House, Lady Salisbury's, Lady Harriet Wentworth's, Mrs Pascoe Glyn's, the Naylor Leylands', Mrs Holford's, and Lady Bute's, amongst a host of others. There were two or three men who used to give hostesses lists of dancing men, and would make the arrangements for the dances. I once went to tea with a great heiress who was giving a dance in a few days. One of these providers of dancing men was just leaving as I entered. He had left the lady who was in charge of the heiress a list of men who were prepared to marry her - with their various incomes and qualifications.

## **THE POST OFFICE RIFLES**

Colonel du Plat Taylor CB had been through Woolwich, but left the Army to become private secretary to the Postmaster-General. During some riots he raised a thousand special constables amongst the employees of the Post Office. When the riots were over he turned them into a Volunteer Corps - the Post Office Rifles, which he commanded, and it was a very smart regiment. He made me join as an Officer, and I much enjoyed our camps at Aldershot. My cousin David Kinloch was then adjutant of the 1st Battalion Grenadier Guards, and he got me attached to his battalion for a month to learn my drill. I had my breakfast at their mess every morning after adjutant's parade at 8 a.m., and then went to my office. The present Duke of Wellington was commanding the Battalion, and of those whom I met frequently afterwards were George Nugent, Fisher Rowe, General Davies, Lord Glenusk, Lord Edward Cecil, Lord John Cecil, and Arthur Wombwell. George Nugent had lately made a great hit as an amateur actor. He asked my advice as to whether he should accept an offer of £40 a week to go on the stage. I strongly advised him not to think of it. I am sorry to say he was killed in the Great War when in command of a Guards Brigade.

The Duke of Teck, father of HM the Queen, became Colonel-in-Chief and he always stayed with us in camp at Aldershot. HRH Princess Mary and HRH Princess May (now The Queen) always came to luncheon and spent a day with us during training. The Duke and Duchess were particularly kind to me as they had known my family for very many years, and they gave me a general invitation to spend Sundays at White Lodge in Richmond Park. We used to play tennis, which in those days was not considered quite correct on Sundays, so I had to conceal this from my family. On Sunday afternoons we had tea under a beech tree in the garden, if fine, and many people came over from London, sometimes the Prince and Princess of Wales (afterwards King Edward and Queen Alexandra), also the Duke of Connaught, and others of the Royal Family. I was nearly always asked to stay for dinner at White Lodge, which was at 8.30 or 9 p.m.

Whilst I was at the Tower the old Duchess of Cambridge died [1889]. She was aunt to Queen Victoria and mother of the Duke of Cambridge, the Grand Duchess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, and the Duchess of Teck. On the day of H.R.H.'s death no bands played and we had to march past without music in slow and quick time. I was commanding the Queen's Company, of which the right-hand man was 6' 9" in his socks and the others were big enough to prevent his looking too tall. I had to lead the Battalion and set the pace without a band to give the time, and was duly cursed by the adjutant, who was a martinet, for my indifferent performance. The right-hand man of the Queen's Company - and so of the British Infantry - was a Scotsman, and his failing in life was an excessive conviviality of spirits. He had no doubt undergone some well-deserved punishment from the adjutant, and was one night found clinging to a lamp post in Piccadilly shouting, "I've come to this through that blighter Kinloch. I hate him. I should like to kill the blighter."

When the Post Office Rifles were organized into Brigades, the Colonels commanding the Regiments of Guards were each given a brigade command in London, and I was appointed ADC to Sir Henry Trotter. At the opening of the Tower Bridge by King Edward (I think he was Prince of Wales at the time), Sir Henry Trotter was in command of all the troops. Whilst King Edward turned the handle to open one bascule on the north side, I simultaneously turned the one on the south side, where I was placed by my General to give orders to the troops on that side of the river.

Another great occasion I well remember was the coronation of King George and Queen Mary in 1910. An ex-Guards Captain, who was a friend of mine, told me he was going to act as a Gold Staff Officer in the Abbey under the Duke of Norfolk who, as Earl Marshal of England, has the control at coronations. My friend laughed me to scorn when I asked if I could not be a Gold Staff Officer, and said the list had been filled long ago. However I wrote to my uncle Sir Frederick St John, His Majesty's Minister at Beme, and asked him to write for me to the Duke who was a great friend of his. I received a reply direct from the Duke:

My dear St. John,

The List of Gold Staff Officers is quite full, but it is impossible for me to refuse any request of your uncle.

Come and see me at 10 a.m. to-morrow.

Yours sincerely,  
Norfolk.

I was duly appointed, and after rehearsing our duties at the Abbey - which were to guide and regulate the pace of the various processions and show people to their seats - we got to know our jobs. The first duty of the day was breakfast at 4.30 a.m. with the Duke of Norfolk in the House of Lords. I went in the levee dress of the Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars - blue and silver, with dark crimson breeches, and Hessian boots with red heels. I found three other officers of my regiment amongst the Gold Staff Officers: Leonard Noble, Brian Molloy, and Jack Churchill. We wore white and gold brassards with 'G.R. & I.' and Crown, and earned a baton of office.

My special duty was to show peers and peeresses to their seats. They began to arrive at 5.30 a.m. I was kept until 4 p.m., looking after an Irish peeress who was lame and could not find her carriage. She said that I must be Irish as I had been so kind to her. I admitted to an Irish grandmother! At 4 p.m. I had luncheon in the House of Lords with the Duke of Norfolk, only one other officer, a Colonel of Devon Yeomanry being left. Incidentally, the Duke was rather fond of wearing old clothes. One day as he was crossing Pall Mall to the Travellers' - also my - Club, he helped an old lady across the street who gave him a sixpence. He wore it ever after on his watch chain.

In 1885 my old friend having given up and retired from his West End Branch, I was offered promotion to take his place but at half his salary and with less than half his agents. I was foolish to accept it

although I was told that it was quite impossible to run the business on such a salary without a private income. The Company now, I believe, is more understanding and pays well, at the same time insisting on good results.

I must now revert a little to business. I was given a new job as Inspector of agents all over the South of England. This suited me very well as I loved the country and had no matrimonial ties. I frequently used the country houses of my friends as centres to visit places in their neighbourhood. As I had travelling expenses allowed it was the only period of my insurance career in which I had enough income to live comfortably on my pay. After this, at my suggestion, my Company opened a Branch Office near Mincing Lane, where I suggested that more of the fire insurance could be got on goods in the Port of London. I had no sooner started as Manager of the City Branch from 1892 than nearly every important Insurance Company in London followed suit, so that I had no monopoly as the result of my idea. When I walk down Mincing Lane occasionally in these days, I think, as I regard the numerous offices there, that but for me they would not be there.

## **2 INFORMATION ABOUT HENRY JOSEPH ST JOHN**

[Colonel St.John saw service in the Boer War in The Queen's Own Oxfordshire Hussars, retiring with the rank of honorary Lieutenant-Colonel. In the 1st World War he was gazetted as Major in the 8th (Service) Battalion, The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry.]

### **Memories of 1st Guards at Waterloo**

In 1900 during the Boer War, after a 20-mile trek in a blazing sun near the Gatzrand in the Transvaal, I arrived with my troop of Oxfordshire Yeomanry, to report myself to the O.C. Mounted Troops of General Hart's column with dispatches from G.H.Q.

I found that my new C.O. was Colonel Wharton Wilson, late 10th Hussars, an old friend, which was a great joy to me. Whilst enjoying the luxury of a bath and the first whiskey and soda I had tasted for months in the Colonel's tent, I was interviewed by the General who wished to see the Officer who had brought the dispatches. I expressed my regret at being improperly dressed on being presented to him. He did not 'tell me off', but took it quite as a matter of course.

When I was dressed and we sat down to dinner, my C.O. said, "My Regimental Sergeant Major is coming in, he is an old 10th Hussar and he is now employed by the Government in peace time as official guide to the battlefields of Waterloo, where he lives. Ask him about anyone you can think of who was in the battle, and he will tell you all about him."

I thought about my great-uncle Joseph St.John, and mentioned his name. "Oh yes, sir," said R.S.M. Welsh, "he was a very young officer, only 16 years of age, in the 1st Guards, now the Grenadiers." I thought it wonderful his knowing all about a young Ensign, and lately finding amongst family papers some letters written by this boy of 16 to his parents I think they may be of interest to the public as they have greatly interested some officers of the Brigade of Guards to whom I have shown them. They give, so they say, some details not known before. The story of the battle as told by a son to his parents somehow appeals more to one and gives a more personal atmosphere than a mere historical account.

Most of the letters are undated. Incidentally, he usually gives only a small 'f' to 'Trench' and a capital 'E' to 'English', but this is no doubt to show his patriotism. In one of his letters he mentions that he

was ‘the senior Ensign of his company’ and that his junior was nearly ‘twice his height and one and a half times his age.’

The first of the letters [I have copied] was written just before Joseph started for the front, after a visit to the Foxes at St.Anne’s Hill. The Baron Hompesch mentioned in this and subsequent letters was a relation of Joseph’s mother, who was Baroness Hompesch of a well-known family with whom his father had made a runaway marriage from a convent in Austria. Joseph speaks of his riding in the Park an Arabian belonging to Colonel D. Barclay, who was his C.O. Joseph was a fine horseman, but very small in stature. Colonel Barclay, frequently mentioned in subsequent letters, appears to have acted as Joseph’s banker during the campaign. The Anstruther mentioned in one of the letters was an Anstruther of Balcaskie - a relative of mine on my mother’s side.

[Joseph writes about the Prussians], although then our dear friends and allies, do not seem to have been any more popular then than now, and their manners appear to have been also much the same. I remember my grandmother, the late Mrs. Ferdinand St.John, telling me that she was in Baden during a Prussian occupation, and that some Prussian cavalry officers, seeing two English women sitting on a seat in the park, in order to frighten them galloped at them full speed and pulled up within a few feet of them. My grandmother knew what their game was, and calmly talked to her friend as though she did not notice their existence - much to the discomfiture of those gallant officers. I may mention that my grandmother, who died at the age of 97, has often described to me the entry of Napoleon into Paris before Waterloo, a French dragoon officer lifting her on to his shoulder to see the sight. She remembered Napoleon as ‘a little man in a grey cloak.’

The letter, dated Bavay 22nd June 1815, is perhaps the most interesting of all, dealing as it does with Quatre Bois and Waterloo. (Through all these letters there is one word which is never mentioned, and that is ‘Waterloo.’ I do not suppose that a name had yet been given to the battle. It is said that it was so called because it was the only one amongst neighbouring villages which was easy to pronounce in English.) The wood he mentions was Bossu Wood, which the 1st (Guards) Division under General Cooke, consisting of Maitland’s 1st and Byng’s 2nd Brigade of Guards, entered and drove out the French. In the historic encounter between the Imperial Guard and the British, Joseph says nothing about “Up Guards and at ‘em”, which a distinguished General Officer of Guards suggests, “completely explodes this story as young St.John would have been sure to hear the Duke say it.”

Joseph’s description of the way the Prussians cheered the British troops is curious reading these days. I remember Joseph’s daughter telling me that her father said all the foreign troops were mad with delight to see the wonderful British Guards who had defeated Bonaparte’s famous Imperial Guard. Joseph seems to have enjoyed his time in Paris up to the point when he began to pine for the pleasures of the chase. Hunting was always his greatest delight, and he always preferred an open-air life in the country to the pleasures which any city could offer.

The Guards have always been renowned for their ‘esprit de corps’, and Joseph shows an intense pride in his Regiment and Brigade. There is a memorial to him in the Guards Chapel at Wellington Barracks, the Headquarters of the Brigade of Guards which he loved so well. His Waterloo medal is in a glass case, which I can see as I write. It has always been decorated with laurels on the 18th of June.

Joseph St.John was a son of George Richard, 3rd Viscount Bolingbroke and 4th Viscount St.John. His grandmother was Fady Diana Spencer, who died in 1808. She was the beautiful daughter of the 3rd Duke of Marlborough, and was born during the life-time of her great-grandmother Sarah, 1st Duchess of Marlborough - a link between the times of Marlborough and Wellington. Sarah left her eight-year-old great-granddaughter Diana £10,000.

George Richard had an unfortunate and incestuous entanglement with his half-sister. His mother had been divorced from his father, and, having married her lover Topham Beauclerk, had a beautiful daughter. George, perhaps thinking to avenge his father's wrong, promptly made love to his half-sister, who gave birth to a son who went into the Navy and was killed in one of Nelson's battles. (The sailor brother referred to in Joseph's letters is no doubt the incestuous offspring of Miss Beauclerk.)

Later, when quite a boy, George took refuge in a parson's house from a storm whilst shooting. He spent the day with the parson's daughter, whom he met then for the first time and became engaged to be married to her before the day was out. The fair daughter of the rectory was not so frail as his Beauclerk touch. She was taking no chances although £40,000 was offered by George's father to her for a release from his promise. They were duly wed and she became mother of the 4th Viscount.

The parson's progeny, however, soon palled upon George's jaded appetite, and he laid siege to the affections of the blushing highly-born Baroness Hompesch in a ?Buchen [Schleswig-Holstein] convent, who satisfied her conscience by considering his first marriage a morganatic one. They went to America after a bigamous marriage and had a considerable family before the first Lady Bolingbroke died. Being married a second time, they had their first legitimate son Ferdinand, my grandfather.

[Editor's Note: The above account by Colonel St.John of the amours of his great-grandfather is incorrect in a number of respects. The biggest of these is his placing the Beauclerk liaison before his first marriage: in fact the reverse was true, and his long-suffering wife actually went to Paris to help with at least one of the four confinements. George Richard had at least fifteen children, the first three and the last three of whom were legitimate. (*See Report 9,31-35.*) I have included the account because it may well represent the version of the facts that the Colonel had received from his parents. The reference to Baroness Hompesch regarding the earlier marriage as morganatic, albeit quite incorrectly, could reflect the way in which George Richard tried to square himself with her. (A morganatic marriage is one contracted with a woman of 'unequal blood' without conferring either title or status on her and without allowing any right of succession to their offspring.)]

Joseph St.John married [at St.George's, Hanover Square, on 28 August 1829,] Lady Isabella Frances FitzRoy, a daughter of the 4th Duke of Grafton. (Joseph himself only appears in the Peerage under 'Duke of Grafton' as he was illegitimate.) Lady Isabella was born in 1793, and was a god-daughter of Horace Walpole, who died in 1798. Lady Isabella remembered being taken to see her godfather, who was in his dressing gown, as she told me when I was a small boy. Lady Isabella's mother was one of the 'Ladies Waldegrave' in the celebrated picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds: she subsequently became Duchess of Gloucester by marrying a brother of George III. I remember Lady Isabella, my great-aunt, because she gave me 5s. when I was a boy. She died in 1875, when I was a boy of fourteen.

Joseph St.John died in 1855, but is well-remembered by the present Duke of Grafton, whose first riding whip as a child was a present from his great-uncle Joseph, as he told me.

Joseph and Lady Isabella had one daughter Antonia St.John, who was well-known as a most charming and accomplished woman.

### **3 ST JOHN LETTERS THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN TRANSCRIBED**

Colonel St.John's transcriptions included part or all of nine letters that have already appeared among the 'St.John Papers - 3' in *Report 29, 57-59, 74-82*. They are:

**157** Viscount Bolingbroke to his half-brother Viscount St.John, dated 4 April 1743

Letters of Joseph Henry St. John:

175 undated

176 dated March 3

177 dated 10 March 1815

178 dated 21st (page 1 only)

179a dated 22 June 1815 (incomplete) (Colonel St. John had the original of this letter in 1925, but it was not found among his papers.)

180 dated July 2 1815

181 dated Wednesday

182 dated July 15 [1815]

#### 4 LETTERS OF JOSEPH ST JOHN THAT HAVE NOT BEEN TRANSCRIBED

[The original letters were not found among Colonel St. John's papers, only copies in manuscript and in type.]

##### Undated and unaddressed letter

*I suppose Colonel Barclay has written to my father to say that I was obliged to draw £40 upon him at Herries & Farquar. I told Colonel B. that I did not know what to do, for I had got a horse & several other things & I had not near money enough (he always used to keep my money for me before he went to England) so he told me that he knew my father wouldn't be angry if I drew £50 upon him when he knew that there was an absolute necessity for it and that he would write and tell my father. He is at Brussels now.*

*Saturday*

*I was forced to give over writing yesterday because I had no more paper, and I had to attend a Court Martial. A private was tried for being 5 days away from the regiment. He was sentenced to receive 100 lashes which he received the same day, and if all the regiments flogged like ours do the soldiers would not have much reason to complain.*

*The other day, I was standing in the Place Royale in Brussels, when a gentleman whom I had never seen before, and who appeared to be a very good humoured sort of a fellow came up to me and said, "You had a brother on board of my brother's ship," and he asked me how Bob was, whether he had quite recovered his health &c, and he turned out to be General Adams brother to Captain A., he commands a division here.*

*Afterwards he began very good naturedly quizzing me about the difference in size between Bob and myself.*

*Last night, an order came for us to be ready at a moment's notice. So soon as the people heard it they were quite sorry for they say that they never saw any troops behave near so well in a garrison as the English and seems so odd to them not having all their things stolen.*

*They are forced to hide their things from the French. To give you an idea of the discipline of the French soldiers, if an inhabitant has anything stolen and he complains to the officers, the men tell them, if they say anything to them, that in some battle they will kill them. In fact the subaltern officers in the French service have not the least command over the soldiers.*

*When we leave this place I suppose that there will be a difficulty in conveying letters to England, so you must not expect to hear from me very often indeed,, but I will write by every person that goes home.*

*Pray remember me to all  
& believe me,  
your affectionate Son,  
J. H. St.John*

### **Dated and addressed letter**

*March 31st 1815.*

*To Viscountess Bolingbroke, Lydiard Park.*

*My dear Mother,*

*You will be surprised at finding we have left Brussels, I never was so sorry to leave a town and the English were so doted upon by the inhabitants. I hope that when we have thrashed this fellow (Napoleon) we shall go there again. I was on guard the last day. Before we were relieved at 12 o 'clock at night, Iliad the honour of ordering at prison a Count Hornpè che (a Flemish man). He was drinking in a public house with one of our privates and began praising Boney and abusing those presen t, so our fellow rowed him for it and the Count drew his sword and thrust at our fellow who immediately ran at him took his sword from him and knocked him down and brought him to the guard room.*

*Well, at 3 o 'clock in the morning I got my things on my horses & we marched huzzaing all the way through the town and the people at the windows crying.*

*By the time that we got 3 miles out of the town, I began to feel ashamed of the Guards, half of the men were so tipsy that they kept tumbling into the ditches, but really it was so ridiculous that I could not help laughing, here and there you saw a fellow rolling in the mud (it was raining very fast) and another on his back in a ditch so tipsy that he could not speak, we (first guards) were quartered upon a little village near Enghien.*

*Lord Wellington is to be at Brussels today, 50,000 Prussians have passed Namur and the remainder of the Allies are crossing the Rhine as fast as possible and what is best Ford Wellington commands the whole.*

[The following three paragraphs appear in the typed copy of the letter but not in Colonel St.John's manuscript.]

*The French have been accustomed to live on other nations lately, during the wars, but now we 'll show them that it is for other nations to live upon them.*

*That poor silly fool, the Duke ofBerri, was at Brussels the other day in the greatest fright imaginable, not being content with being frightened himself, but wanting to make these poor fellows frightened too.*

*The old King is going to live for the present at Prince of Orange's Palace in London.  
What do you think that our friends the Prussians did when they were at Brussels?*

*Very likely my father remembers that there were a great many statues in the park, well these "gentlemen" used to amuse themselves with knocking off the noses of these statues, and the people have put a false nose to all the statues. They (the Prussians) are detested by the Belgians.*

*Colonel Barclay told me a Prussian Officer was travelling at a post house, however just as he was starting he asked his servant whether he had got everything. The servant said, "Yes," but immediately said, "No, I have forgotten one thing, I have forgotten to flog the postmaster." "Why, has he deserved it?" "No, sir, not this time, but he may do something." So he flogged the poor fellow.*

*I dined with General Maitland who commands the Brigade of Guards, in fact they know now better than to put anyone else but a Guardsman at the head of us. Even in Spain Sir William Stewart who had the command of our division could not manage them, so at last he gave up the command of us and Lord Wellington said to him, "Why Stewart, you could not manage these gentlemen's sons?" And he said that even when he had us himself a long time ago he could not do it.*

*Pray remember me to all  
and believe me, your affectionate son  
J. St. John*

#### **An undated fragment**

*The men were put in barns and 5 of us officers got into a little room in a cottage, the baggage not come up, wet through and without anything to eat. this was about 12 o'clock in the day, but we sent a man into Enghien to buy some meat and bread and we made the people of the cottage cook for us. There was only one bed in the room, so we gave it up to a fellow who was not very well, and 3 of us made our servants get via dozen trusses of straw out of the barn and we slept on the straw (and were glad enough to get that even), of the pleasures of campaigning!!! But really it is good fun - at least not too much of it.*

*I have now got into comfortable quarters here. I went yesterday to see a grotto near here that took 7 years making. It is a most beautiful thing.*

## ANTONIA ST JOHN'S LETTERS

In 1994 Thamesdown Corporation acquired some interesting items that had been sent to Sotheby's from New Zealand by Lady Bolingbroke. These items included four notebooks (Lyd. 1994/114 a-d) and three letters (Lyd. 1994/137/1-3) which were formerly the property of Antonia Georgina Isabella St. John. She was the daughter of Joseph Henry St. John, who was one of the sons of George Richard, Viscount Bolingbroke, and Baroness von Hompesch. (Antonia gives the full names of the Baroness as Isabella Antonia Marianne Charlotte Sophia.) Antonia's mother was Lady Isabella Frances FitzRoy, daughter of the 4th Duke of Grafton and his wife Lady Charlotte Maria Waldegrave, daughter of James, 2nd Earl Waldegrave.

With such an array of coronets it is not surprising that Antonia's four notebooks contain pedigrees relating to the St. John family, which in each case terminate with her: presumably they are her own work. (The tables do not acknowledge the illegitimacy of Antonia's father: in each case he appears as the Hon. Joseph Henry.) One of the select pedigrees contains annotations which will bring sadness to any present-day researcher who regrets the dispersal of the St. John archive. Table 1 in 114a has the addition in pencil, Those marked +1 have letters of. Ten persons are thus identified. They are:

Eleanor, daughter of Nicholas St. John, who married Sir Thomas Cave  
Catherine St. John who married Sir Giles Mompesson  
Sir Charles Pleydell  
Sir Walter St. John  
Lady Johanna St. John  
Oliver, son of Sir Walter St. John  
Lady Mary Rich, first wife of Henry, later Viscount St. John  
Henry, 1st Viscount Bolingbroke  
John, 2nd Viscount St. John  
Lady Diana Spencer, wife of Frederick, 2nd Viscount Bolingbroke, who, after divorce, married Topham Beauclerk.

Sadly, only the last of these letters has survived. It was written by Lady Diana Beauclerk (d. 1808) to her son George Richard, 3rd Viscount Bolingbroke who was in America. It is dated from Richmond on 17 January 1804. George Richard deserted his first wife Charlotte, who continued to live at Lydiard. He went through a form of marriage in Germany with Baroness von Hompesch and, to escape detection, went with her to America as Mr and Mrs Bellasis. Charlotte died at the Hotwells, Bristol, on 11 January 1804 and was buried at Lydiard on the 19th. George Richard and the Baroness married at New York on 1 August 1804, but did not leave America until after they had sold their house in May 1806. The letter reads:

*Indeed my dear G: receiving a few lines from you has been a great comfort to me, & now I hope to have a much greater that of seeing you as I understand you must come to England now - & I trust I shall live to see you - you would not know one, hardly guess at me were you not to find me here where you left me - I never stir from hence my health will not permit me, so I only see my few friends for a minute at time*

*My Bro. Rob' looks amazingly well - the Bouveries are well only poor M<sup>rs</sup> B has not recovered the loss of poor Everard - nor ever will quite I fear*

*All the people you inquire about are alive & merry - but I can not write much at a time therefore shall not waste my Eyes - we shall I hope talk of every thing soon I hope*

*The Trevors who are at Rich<sup>d</sup> often enquire about you - she poor soul has dreadful Epileptic fits - How dreadfully you must have suffer'd in the horrible Climate you mention come away as fast as you can & let me or my Br<sup>o</sup> know when once the time is fixed that I may be expecting you - you don't*



## Letter 2

Whitehall Tuesday Night

My dearest Mama

Your Royal Highness may easily conceive how happy I am to have seen my dear Maria married this morning before I left Navestock. If ever any match promised happiness this does, from their very sincere attachment to each other. Altho' I assure you my Happiness loses at present a great [sic] in being parted from her. Instead I sh<sup>d</sup> reckon myself very ungrateful If I did not feel unhappy at leaving her, whose affection has always made me so happy, as I do believe no Sister ever loved another more than we have done, and must always do - I return to Navestock on Friday, with L<sup>d</sup> and D Waldegrave and shall remain there till I go to Sibthorpe, which I hope to do in March. When I wrote last post, I was alarmed for fear they were not to be married at Navestock, but luckily L<sup>d</sup> Waldegrave did not consult M<sup>r</sup> Walpole nor anybody who w<sup>d</sup> have encouraged him in the idea that it was indecent for them to be married so soon after L<sup>d</sup> Waldegrave's death at Navestock. They go to Lyndhurst on Friday. After I had sent my last letter to y<sup>r</sup> R. H. my desire of coming to Nice with the Duchess of Ancaster, which I had told you of, that I c<sup>d</sup> not forbear writing to her to ask her to bring me as I flattered my self that you w<sup>d</sup> have no objection as I c<sup>d</sup> have returned with her in the Spring. And I should have been so happy to have been in the same place with you for two months. And altho' I had no time to have asked your consent, yet I know you would have excused my coming without, but great was my dissapointment [sic] when I fear she [means] to go to [Mon ], and not to Nice which has [rendered] my scheme entirely of the head. Maria did look so very pretty this morning they were married at Church, he looked very handsome, and so happy. She was in a white Dimity Night gown, the same sort of [R ] as the Picture. I hope your R. H. has got of her by this time. I fear you will be hardly able to read this, but for this last week one eye has been quite closed by an Inflammation, & it now pains me much, so that I can hardly see what I write. I must say Hand Lady Waldegrave seemed perfectly happy when the Eustons were married. I believe I told your R. H. that Mr. FitzRoy had wrote to beg I would live with them, and that I had declined, since that I have received a letter from Mr. FitzRoy upon the same subject. What I am going to add is only Mr. Walpole's and my idea, and I will do as you please, which is, If the FitzRoys and I were to take a house in town together, We w<sup>d</sup> be of use to each other, living with them w<sup>d</sup> be a protection for me. Altho' she is younger than me and my living with them would be of use to their Finances. This plan I only mention, and of course I shall settle nothing till I have.....

## SWINDON BOROUGH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

1997 brought **Unitary Authority** to Swindon. The name Thamesdown was exchanged for that of Swindon, and the new Borough Council assumed many of the roles previously undertaken by Wiltshire County Council. The year was marked with a visit by Her Majesty the Queen to the town on November 7th, during which she dined at Lydiard Park and attended a reception in the State Rooms of the House.

**The Queen's visit to Lydiard Park**, her longest stop of the day, brought enthusiastic crowds to the front of the House. Inside the Queen toured the State Rooms, chatting to guests, and commenting on the building and its history. She signed a special page in our Visitors Book, which, together with photographs commemorating her visit, are now on display in the House.

I am not sure whether the Queen noticed Daisy as she walked through the House, but many of our visitors have been startled by our new character figure. **Daisy the kitchen maid**, surrounded by Victorian utensils, has featured in a popular new display which focuses on a less glamorous aspect of country house life. The exhibition has benefitted from Miss Kathleen Rumming's sterling work in tracing exhibits and from the donation of various Lydiard items by Mrs Margaret North (née Willetts), both of whom are Friends of Lydiard Tregoz. Thanks are due to Mrs Joanna Atkinson (née Gay) who loaned a magnificent copper pot engraved with the Bolingbroke coronet which originated from the Lydiard kitchens.

**A surprise find**, which has been incorporated into the exhibition, was a large quantity of oyster shells. These were discovered on a buried rubbish heap by workmen digging a new drainage ditch near the site of the old service wing of the House. The oysters were most probably cultivated in the Lydiard lakes. They were found alongside butchery bones and a clay pipe.

**Conservation programmes** were given a boost in 1997 with news of a prestigious award from the Woodmansteme Conservation Trust towards the cleaning of a portrait of Oliver St John, 1st Viscount Grandison. The award, one of only eight in the country, will also allow us to have the picture's 17th-century frame restored and gilded.

A woollen tapestry panel, which was made by the 4th Viscountess Bolingbroke in the early 19th century, has also received much-needed attention. The framed panel, which shows a boy and dogs, had been attacked by beetle. The picture was treated at the Area Museum Council Textile Laboratory in Bath, and is now back on permanent display in the Library.

**The major restoration project** of the year has been to curtain the main Hall of the House. We now have three sets of crimson moreen curtains which fit the descriptions in the 1848 inventory of the House. These were purchased from money raised from the sale of tickets for our 'Shakespeare in the Park' event in July.

**Heartbreak's Shakespearean productions** are now a feature of the Lydiard calendar. This year they will be returning to perform *Macbeth* in a floodlit setting in front of the House on 25th and 26th July. *Macbeth* is part of a much wider programme of events and activities, held in and around the House, which I hope as Friends you will enjoy and support.

As part of **Heritage Open Days** in 1997 the House was opened to the public free of charge and the State Rooms were decorated with stunning 18th-century-style flower displays. This year, on the 12th and 13th September, visitors will be invited to drop in on the Bolingbrokes of Georgian times, brought

to life by their acclaimed historical interpreters Beaux Stratagem. The triptych in St. Mary's church will also be on view on the same days - an excellent opportunity to see this rare family monument.

Lydiard's **Education Service** continues to attract a growing number of school visits, with studies linking the House, its collections and history, to the National Curriculum. Visitor figures generally are healthy despite a wet summer. **Visitor Book** records show strong support from the local community as well as many tourists from Britain and from overseas, which is encouraging considering our modest publicity budget.

So, do come and enjoy the activities at Lydiard Park: there is plenty going on and, as always, I value your support, encouragement, and suggestions.

Best wishes,

Sarah Finch-Crisp  
The Keeper, Lydiard Park.

## SHORTER NOTES.

**THE REV. ANN MACKENZIE.** After an energetic and caring ministry at Lydiard, the Rev. Rob Buries moved to Park North, Swindon. We are delighted to welcome the Rev. Ann Mackenzie as the new Team Vicar with particular responsibility for Lydiard Tregoze. She comes from St.Mary's, Bletchley, and was licensed by the Bishop of Swindon on 21 January 1998. As Friends, we look forward to many years of fruitful cooperation with her.

### **THE FRIENDS OF LYDIARD TREGOZ GO TO BATTERSEA**

[Reproduced, with small additions by kind permission, from *Lydiards Magazine*, June 1996.]

For the annual meeting in 1996, a number of Friends assembled at Lydiard Park on 10 May to travel by coach to London to investigate the historic connections between Battersea and Lydiard Tregoze.

The coach crossed Battersea bridge. Our target - Sir Walter St.John School - was literally almost within touching distance on our right hand. However, a London, crowded with cars and one-way systems, was not going to hand it to us on a plate! And it was another half-hour before the quite remarkably unflustered driver managed to pull up near the School. There is nothing like a close shave from disaster - even if only that of nearly being late! - to draw people together, and it was now a group of closely-knit friends who walked through the fine old school and took their places in the Hall. It was good to be joined in the Hall by other Friends who cannot be with us at Lydiard as often as they would like.

We found most moving the introductory talk and welcome by Dr. Arnold Taylor, one of our Vice-Presidents. His grandfather, father (whose portrait is in the hall at Lydiard Park), and brother had been Headmasters of the School, completing between them an incredible 258 terms. The School was, indeed, Dr. Taylor's home. The President, Mr Leighton, Secretary Mrs Sarah Finch-Crisp, and Canon Brian Came (whose skill in presenting annually an absorbing book, *Report*, continues to amaze!) then completed the general business of the AGM.

Then followed two talks. The first was by Mr Terry Shaw of Wandsworth Libraries. He described, with plenty of visual aids, the gradual development of that part of London known as Battersea, and helped to clarify for us the link between it and Lydiard Tregoze. Whilst enjoying the history, we shuddered at the condition of the poor in the early days. Fortunately Sir Walter St.John, a man of Puritan sympathies, was generous: he was responsible for the establishment in 1700 of the St. Walter St.John School in Battersea High Street, and gave freely towards the upkeep of the nearby almshouses. Though he lived in Battersea, Lydiard was his holiday home (and a source of county produce). He sat in several parliaments, five times as knight of the shire for Wiltshire and once for Wootton Bassett.

After Mr Shaw's talk, Dr. Frances Harris spoke on the family and political archive of the Spencer family in the British Library and of their estate papers which are in the Northampton Record Office. (The Spencers acquired Battersea from the St. Johns in 1763.) She spoke of how the holdings of the Spencers grew to include Battersea.

We moved on then to Battersea parish church, which was beautifully decorated with flowers, and to welcome refreshments in the cipt. Someone there must have been warned of the superb spread put on at tea-time when the annual meeting is at Tregoze - they met the challenge perfectly! Evensong afterwards in the church, with specially prepared music by the choir, was calming as we gazed at the

painted glass east window of 1631, inserted by Sir John St. John to commemorate his succession to the lordship of the manor and showing the connections with his estate at Lydiard Tregoze - the sister of this window, also by Abraham van Linge, can be seen in our own St. Mary's church. There were also memorials to Oliver St. John, Viscount Grandison, and Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke. Recorded on panels, forming the frontage of the gallery, were now-familiar details: the establishment of the school in Battersea High Street, and also tributes to Dr. Taylor's family. The church, well worth a visit for its connections with Lydiard Tregoze, has also a wider interest, being connected with famous names such as the poet and painter William Blake, the botanist William Curtis, and J.W.M. Turner (the very chair on which Turner sat to paint cloud effects and sunsets from the oriel window in the vestry is there!)

As we boarded the coach someone noticed that the clock on the church was going - backwards! Now we knew how Alice felt, Through the Looking Glass. Somehow that just added to the charm and unexpectedness of the whole event, and a quite outstanding warmth had been established between all who took part. A memorable day, indeed.

Constance Reed

### **COMPANIONS OF THE YEW**

Greetings for the Friends have been received from Mrs Marilyn Harrison, who lives at 90 Beaulieu Close, Toothill, Swindon, SN5 8AJ, who is a member of the Companions of the Yew. She has written, in explanation:

One purpose of the Companions of the Yew is to investigate the mysterious questions of the growth patterns of the English Yew, *Taxus Baccata*. It is uniquely difficult to verify anything about the yew. For one thing they do not seem to conform to the pattern of annual ring production which is typical of other species, so that age and history are not reliably revealed in this way. To compound the problem, the older trees go hollow, even making accurate carbon dating impossible.

What we know about yews is mostly packed into a very thin slice of time in comparison with their life span. The best and most obvious way past these problems is to case-study individual yews over their entire lives, then we will have a more complete picture of their ways. Probably you will have spotted the flaw in this plan: we will all be long dead before any answers become evident. Looking at the Companions of the Yew in the light of this truism, it is clear that trust in the future, in our descendants and their values, is an essential component of the exercise. Thus it is possible to view the work of the Companions as simply studying yew trees, but we can also see in their work a vehicle for connecting ancestors and descendants, in which the study of and reverence for a potentially immortal tree whose symbolism is that of death and rebirth, is clearly relevant. Thus the main aim of the Companions of the Yew can be considered as the promotion of continuity and discourse between generations.

For some individuals, there is the added dimension of getting out there with the trees. This is a spiritual aspect, associated with the ancestor-descendant link.

I have chosen to study the four yews in the churchyard of St. Mary's church, Lydiard Tregoze. They are beautiful trees in a beautiful place. Who knows what they will tell me and my descendants?

There are four yews, two females and one male within the churchyard, all of which have been trimmed and look in good condition, and one male just outside the churchyard wall, the main tree of which has been removed but healthy shoots come from the stump. (The stump of this tree is covered with ivy, and there are a lot of other trees growing all round and very close.)

Details of the four yews are as follows:

- 1 Male tree outside the churchyard and to the North-East. 16' 8" around stump. pH level 7. Light green.
- 2 Female to the South-East of the churchyard. Large branches have been cut from the trunk. 14' around the bottom, 13'7" at 3', and 13'7" at 4' from the bottom. pH level 7.5, alkali. Dark green.
- 3 Male tree to the South-West of the churchyard. Large branches have been cut from the trunk. 8' 10" around the bottom and 7' 4" at 2' from the bottom. I have been unable to measure further up as there are a lot of shoots growing. pH level 7.5, alkali. Dark green.
- 4 Female tree to the North-West of the churchyard. 8' 7" at the bottom, 10' 3" at 3' 2", and 10' 7" at 4' 8" from the ground. A lot of branches have been cut from the trunk. pH 7.5, alkali. Dark green.

[We are grateful to Mrs Harrison for this record and for the accompanying photographs which will be kept in the Friends' archive.]

#### **CHARLES BRINSDEN, RECTOR 1747-80**

In *Report 30* (1997), 36-37, it is stated that Charles Brinsden, son of John Brinsden of St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, Middlesex, gent., graduated B. A. in 1729 and was made deacon and ordained priest by the Bishop of Llandaff in 1733. The only information that survives about his ordination appears on the margin of the first of two dispensations he received from the Archbishop of Canterbury to enable him to hold two benefices in plurality. The first of these dispensations (1737) describes him as already chaplain to the Rt. Hon. James (Brydges), Duke of Chandos, and vicar of Queen Camel, Somerset, and allows him to become also rector of Marksbury, Somerset. The second dispensation (1747) was granted after he had resigned as vicar of Queen Camel and describes him as chaplain to the Rt. Hon. Henry (Hyde), Earl of Clarendon, and allows him to hold the benefices of Marksbury and Lydiard Tregoze. The presentation to Lydiard Tregoze was made by Henry St. John, formerly 1st Viscount Bolingbroke.

Many households employed resident chaplains. (Charles Carleton, *Archbishop William Laud* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987) 85, described them as 'rich men's theological flunkies.'). The duties of chaplains could well vary from place to place, but all chaplains were responsible for leading prayers for the family and also for the servants and acting as spiritual advisors to the whole household. Normally they would say grace before dinner and withdraw before the port was served. There may have been some tutoring and some secretarial duties. Chaplains were a symbol of social status. Sir Walter St. John, after the death of his nephew in 1656, 'being newly come to the possession of a great estate... resolved to keep a chaplain in his house.' Simon Patrick, later Bishop of Ely, was appointed. Patrick cared for the spiritual life of the whole household, enjoyed a very good relationship with Sir Walter and Lady Johanna, and had time for study and writing.

James Brydges (1673/4-1744), son of James, Lord Chandos of Sudeley (d. 1714) came from a modest background in Herefordshire and set out to make his fortune in London. By dint of persistence and business acumen he succeeded. He became M.P. for Hereford in 1698, and, from 1705 till 1713, during the War of the Spanish Succession, was paymaster-general of Marlborough's army abroad. He amassed great wealth through the lucrative office of paymaster, and was a successful investor and speculator, acquiring property in a number of counties. In 1714 he was made Earl of Carnarvon, and in 1719 Marquess of Carnarvon and Duke of Chandos. He was a notable patron of the arts.

He had married Mary (d. 1712), daughter and afterwards heir of Sir Thomas Lake of Canons, near Edgware, Middlesex. The Duke is reputed to have spent £200,000 on re-building and embellishing the house there. The house, with its attached chapel (1720), had a fairly plain exterior and a truly sumptuous interior. In 1714 he largely rebuilt the parish church of St.Lawrence's, Whitchurch.

*The Complete Peerage* quotes from Daniel Defoe, *A Gentleman's Tour through England* (1724):

The chapel... hath a choir of vocal and instrumental musick, as the Royal chapel, and when his Grace goes, he is attended by his Swiss Guards, ranged as the Yeomen of the Guard, few German Sovereign Princes live with that magnificence.

[Pope's] invective, and the easy journey for gaping tourists from London, helped to make Canons a byword for ostentation. So too did the style of living of 'princely Chandos', who maintained a corps of Chelsea pensioners, lodged in pairs of houses at the three main gates, as well as his famous private orchestra, and whose collecting mania led agents to scour the known world for exotic birds, animals, and plants. Popular interest, attracted on so many counts, was afterwards gratified by reflections on the transience of Canons's glory. [The house was demolished after the death of James Brydges.]

[VCH, *Middlesex*, V 115.]

Brydges corresponded with Handel from 1717, and employed him as conductor of some of his early concerts. For Canons Handel wrote the first version of *Esther, Acis and Galatea*, and at least twelve anthems, and superintended the performance there of the two oratorios in 1719-20. The fashionable Londoner would travel the nine miles to the little parish church to hear Handel's music and to see the great man conduct the resident choir and thirty-strong orchestra.

Canons, thus, had a great reputation and a sturdy musical tradition when Charles Brinsden became chaplain, probably soon after his ordination in 1733. Further research is necessary to discover how many chaplains were employed by the duke. John Robert Robinson, *The Princely Chandos* (Sampson Low, 1893) has references to two chaplains: (p.55) [In 1714 Chandos] 'presented to the vicarage of St.Lawrence, Whitchurch, the Rev. John Theophilus Desaguliers, LL.D., F.R.S., [of Christ Church, Oxford] and made him his chaplain'; and (p. 184) 'The Rev. Hugh Shorthouse, chaplain to the Duke of Chandos, and lecturer at Chelsea, died early in February 1735. This reverend gentleman was without doubt the Duke's town chaplain, as it has already been shown that the Rev. Dr. Desaguliers held a similar appointment at Canons.'

One further question remains, and that is how Brinsden obtained the favour of Chandos in being given the chaplaincy and the favour of Henry St.John in being presented to the rectory of Lydiard Tregoze. The Brydges papers are incorporated in the Stowe MS, which are in the Huntington Library and Art Collections in San Marino, California. C.H. Collins Baker and Muriel I. Baker worked on these papers and published *The Life and Circumstances of James Brydges First Duke of Chandos* (OUP, 1949). In this book there are a number of references to a Mr Brinsden and to Henry St.John, which include:

(p. 188) [concerning the wine at Canons] Besides these French wines we note Tokay from Breslau, in which Henry St.John was to share.

(p. 190) Steady patronage [for wine] went to Taunton of Southampton, Brinsden, and Messrs Tatem.

(p.210) [In 1720 Chandos had] three mortgages on land amounting to £80,000. One of these mortgages was Bucklebury, Bolingbroke's estate.

(p.238) [In 1722 Chandos wrote to his son] ordering him to wait on Lord Bolingbroke, if in Paris, and apply himself to writing and reading.

(p.419) [Chandos made his will in 1742 and] left £200 to Mr Brinsdon in gratitude 'for his friendship in proposing the marriage between me and the present Duchess of Chandos which thanks be to God hath provided an unspeakable comfort and happiness to me.'

It may be that Charles Brinsden was recommended to the Duke by one of his wine merchants, who may have been Charles's father or uncle. (In the Stowe MS there are almost one hundred letters from the Duke to wine merchant Brinsden. The Chief Curator of Manuscripts at the Huntington Library kindly read the seven letters from 1733, but found no reference to anything of a personal or family nature.)

It is also probable that the friendship between the Duke and Henry St. John was the ground from which the presentation to Lydiard Tregoze grew. The Duke, when he was paymaster-general, must have worked closely with Henry St. John, who was then secretary-at-war. Afterwards they had a mutual interest in wine, and the Duke was mortgagee of Bucklebury, the estate of Henry St. John's first wife, Frances Winchcombe (d. 1718).

### ***A JOURNEY IN WAR-TIME* by Isabella Stjohn**

Although there is an absolute minimum of autobiographical detail in the book, it is clear that it was written by Isabella (d.1948) the wife of the diplomat Sir Frederick St. John K.C.M.G. and daughter of Captain the Hon. James Terence Fitzmaurice R.N. The book was published by John Lane in 1919, and deals with just over ten days - very eventful days for her - at the beginning of December early in World War I. The book runs to 192 pages. There are no chapter divisions - which seems strange at first - but such divisions would be unwelcome breaks in what proves to be an extraordinary, non-stop, conversational, account which is only relieved by the author sharing her thoughts and feelings with the reader from time to time.

It all started at a tea party one Sunday afternoon at a friend's London house. When Lady St. John entered the room she was completely surprised and horrified to receive condolences from the assembled group, some of whom were sure that they had seen her eldest son's name in the tragic lists of wounded, missing, or dead soldiers that appeared in the daily papers. This was the first that Lady St. John had heard of the matter, but she was only too aware that no letter had been received from him over the previous fortnight, which was quite unusual. Although it was Sunday, she went straight away to the War Office, where, eventually, she found the Officers' Casualty Inquiry Office and the ledgers were consulted. After a long search a St. John was found with the home address from which Sir Frederick and Lady St. John had recently moved. As a mother and grandmother, Lady St. John's concern for her son grew and grew.

Despite every argument and discouragement from family and friends and the fact that the weather was atrocious, she set out four days later for France with a complete fluency in the language, a visa from the French embassy, and very little luggage. She had one thing more - a complete conviction that she was under the direct protection and leading of God. At Calais she managed to get a train ticket for Hazebrouck although she did not have a military permit and had not the slightest idea where she was to find her son. The train was without heat or light, but the journey proved to be 'thrillingly interesting through the company and conversation' of the French soldiers in the same carriage as herself. From Hazebrouck she managed to get a dreadfully uncomfortable lift as far as a village on the Bethune-La Bassée road, where she met her son two days after leaving London. He had arrived at that precise place for a rest behind the lines half-an-hour before she did. There was great consternation at her visit, but the General, having been reassured that no soldier under his command had assisted her in any way, agreed that she should be allowed to stay until sufficiently rested to undertake the return journey. She stayed for three-and-a-half days, and walked into her London home just as coffee was being served after dinner.

This bald account can give no impression of the extraordinary determination of the author nor of the physical suffering that she took in her stride. The whole story is full of what we might - but Lady

St.John would not - have called 'coincidences'. Lady St.John's description of the Northern France at war she travelled through is most evocative. For only three days she was close to the front line, but is able to describe vividly and at first-hand the life and deprivation of an officer class which regarded duty as a calling and was hourly prepared for death.

I found the book compulsive reading, and my admiration for Lady St.John was unquestioning. My only - unworthy - regret was that there was no appendix by her son to record his feelings when his mother came all the way to see him. Perhaps it was fortunate that the book was not published until 1919 lest other mothers may have been encouraged to follow her example.

### **CORRIGENDA and ADDENDUM in *Report 30***

p.21 lines 12-15 and p.22 lines 2 and 5, The suggestion by Canon Jackson about abortive presentations was so reasonable that John de **Middleton** was omitted from the list of those who actually became incumbents of Lydiard Tregoze. The *Calendar of Papal Registers*.

*Papal Letters*. III (1342-62) p.330,

however, reproduces a list of those who had received a papal indult to choose their own confessors, and includes:

17 March 1350 John de Middleton rector of Lidyerd in the diocese of Salisbury.

So, where does the truth lie?

### **THE FRIENDS OF LYDIARD TREGOZ**

Officers for 1997-98:

President: Mr.H.G.M. Leighton, M.A., F.S.A.

Vice-Presidents: Field-Marshal Sir Roland Gibbs,  
G.C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.

Dr. Arnold Taylor, C.B.E., M.A., D.Litt.,  
Docteur h.c. (Caen), F.B.A., Hon.V.-P.S.A., F.R.Hist.S.

Secretary: Mrs. Sarah Finch-Crisp, B.A.,  
[REDACTED]

Treasurer: Mr. Richard Clarke,  
[REDACTED]

Committee: The Rev. Rob Buries.  
Mr. Tom Hassall, M.A., F.S.A., M.I.F.A.  
Mr. Russell Weymouth.

Editor of *Report*: Canon Brian Carne, B.Com., F.S.A.,  
[REDACTED]

## OBITUARY

Mr W.E.L. Ellery

Mrs Agnes Newman

Our sympathy is with Mrs Ellery and with Mr Newman. We shall certainly miss the gentle presence and the wide knowledge of these two valued members at our meetings.

Bill Ellery will be particularly missed by his old Sinjun friends. He won a scholarship to Sir Walter's school in 1924, and, as a pupil, particularly enjoyed his music and various sporting activities. After war-time service in the Royal Navy with mine sweepers, he had a busy working life in the world of Insurance until 1971, and in his retirement he and Muriel, his partner for fifty-two years, have had an equally busy life, enjoying their family, playing golf, making music together, and researching his family's history in Cornwall. Donations in his memory were given to the Polraan branch of the R.N.L.I.

## NEW MEMBERS

[REDACTED]

## RESIGNATION

[REDACTED]

The Friends of Lydiard Tregoz owe a great debt of gratitude to Bill Jacob. Bill joined us because of his interest in the Shelley family and of their slight links with the St.Johns: he also, most generously, offered to undertake the kind of research that Mr. Smallwood had done in the libraries and record offices of London. His contribution to the *Report*, therefore, lay not just in the fine series of articles that he himself wrote over a number of years but in the facts and figures that appeared in other articles by other hands. And then in March 1985 Charley Walters, our secretary and treasurer died. Bill Jacob agreed to take over this vital role in our society, and continued to do so for seven years. He was at first reluctant to do so because he felt that living at Orpington may be an impediment, but it did not prove to be so. He earned on a lively correspondence with members and did research for them. He also visited all the London institutions that receive complimentary copies of *Report*: he asked that their holding should be checked so that he could make good any losses and also examined the way in which the holding was indexed. His resignation from the Friends is concomitant to his desire to catch up with a range of interests and activities that demand his attention. We wish him many more years of active and fruitful retirement, and thank him for what he did for us over so many years.

## CHANGE OF ADDRESS



### **Copies of *Report* are deposited with:**

The British Library

The Bodleian Library

Cambridge University Library

Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William & Mary, Williamsburg, USA

The College of Arms

The Society of Antiquaries of London

The Society of Genealogists

The Public Record Office at Kew

The Council for the Care of Churches

Battersea Library

Sir Walter St John's Association

Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society

Glamorgan Record Office

Wiltshire Record Office

Wootton Bassett Historical Society

The Borough of Swindon

Swindon Public Library

Swindon Museum

## INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT.

### FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31st DECEMBER 1997

To Postage	37.26	By Subscriptions	502.61
Telephone	4.98	Donations	57.00
Research	12.34	Sales	7.00
Wiltshire Local		Bank Interest	3.50
History Forum	7.00		
Battersea AGM	260.00		
less receipts	<u>156.00</u>		
	104.00		
<i>Report 30</i>	260.00		
Hatchments transport	<u>25.00</u>		
	450.58		
<u>Add:</u>			
Excess of Income over Expenditure	119.53		
	<u>£570.11</u>		<u>£570.11</u>
	=====		=====

### BAUANCE SHEET as at 31st DECEMBER 1997

Accumulated Fund			
31st December 1996	695.04		
<u>Add:</u>			
Excess of Income over Expenditure	<u>119.53</u>		
	814.57		
<u>Current Liabilities:</u>		<u>Current Assets:</u>	
Fees in advance	36.00	Cash at Bank:	
Society of Antiquaries	750.00	Current	19.85
	£ 754.04	Deposit	1323.14
		Suspense	<u>257.58</u>
		Total Deposit	1580.72
	<u>1600.57</u>		<u>1600.57</u>
	=====		=====

Richard T. Clarke.  
Hon. Treasurer.

Audited & found correct.  
R.E. Entwisle, A.C.M.A.

Friends of Lydiard Tregoz  
16 May 1998