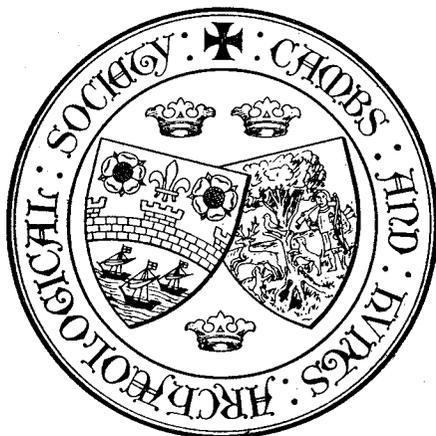


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VOLUME VI. PART V.

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EDITED BY THE REV. E. H. VIGERS, M.A.  
RECTOR OF ABBOTS RIPTON WITH LITTLE STUKELEY, HUNTS.

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# HUNTINGDONSHIRE FOLK AND THEIR FOLKLORE.

BY C. F. TEBBUTT.

Since the time when "Cuthbert Bede" was Curate of Glatton,<sup>1</sup> Folklore has been largely a neglected study in Huntingdonshire, and I have found few printed sources from which to draw. The chief of these are Cuthbert Bede's numerous contributions to Notes and Queries over a long period of years, Bird's "Memorials of Godmanchester," Saunder's "Legends and Traditions of Huntingdonshire," and my own "History of Bluntisham and Earith."

In 1937 Col. L. Tebbutt of Cambridge offered prizes to the Hunts. Federation of Women's Institutes for the best collection of village tales. Entries from Great Gransden (Mrs. Dale), Ramsey Mereside (Mrs. Ingle), and Great Paxton (Mrs. Chamberlain) were especially valuable from a Folklore point of view. Included with the above, a number of MS. notes, mostly recorded by Dr. Garrood and myself, have been deposited with the Eastern Counties Folklore Society at Cambridge.

It is difficult to assess the importance of these notes beyond the fact that, with the exception of those from printed sources, few of them could be recorded in 20 or, perhaps, even 10 years time.

We are, I think, lucky in our survivals (either in fact or memory) of the Plough Monday and May Day festivals, and the completeness of our records of these. The remarkable ceremony of the Straw Bear deserves special mention. I can find no parallel. It has curious affinities with the ceremony of killing the sacred bear by the Gilyaks of Eastern Siberia as recorded by Frazer (Golden Bough, abridged edition, p. 510).

These notes are far from complete, and one of my motives in publishing them is to stimulate others to collect, record and pass on to me Folklore notes as opportunity occurs.

I wish especially to thank Miss O'Reilly for help in searching Notes and Queries, Dr. Garrood and Dr. Newton for recording the Sawtry Mummers' play and May Day Songs from the Alconbury district, and Miss Adams and Mr. Findlay for the Plough Monday song from St. Neots and Yelling, and other items.

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1. "Cuthbert Bede" was the *nom-de-plume* of the Rev. Edward Bradley, Curate of Glatton with Holme, 1850-1854, and Rector of Denton with Caldecote, 1859-1871.

### BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD.

Under this heading might be included many superstitious common to most of England. It is however, worth noting that, as in most of East Anglia, belief in "couvade" is widespread, and that the husband actually does suffer pain of some sort at the time of his wife's pregnancy and labour, is authenticated in many cases. Toothache and neuralgia are common ailments at such times, both at the later stages of pregnancy as well as during the actual time of the birth.

When visiting a new-born baby for the first time, it is considered proper for friends and relatives to put a gift in its hand to bring it luck. From the nearest relative this gift should if possible be of gold. In one village recently a half sovereign has been bought and sold several times over to serve this purpose.

Cuthbert Bede notes that at Glatton a lucky gift for a baby was an egg, a pinch of salt and a penny. (N. & Q. Vol. III. 3rd S. 1863).

### COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE.

A few beliefs with a local flavour may be noted. It was believed in St. Neots that if a girl met a man while walking through the churchyard at midnight, she would marry him. A St. Neots girl is said, to have thus met and married a negro (later to become a well-known character, nick-named Congo).

Lacemaking, an occupation chiefly followed in the south of the county, provided young men with a chance to show their devotion to their sweethearts. Elaborately carved and turned bone and wood bobbins were made as gifts. These were sometimes inlaid with lettering in silver or pewter to declare some such sentiment as "Love to Mabel," or more boldly, "Kiss me quick." It was also lucky for a bridegroom to make his wife a bobbin from a bone out of the joint eaten at the wedding feast.

From north-east Hunts, comes the belief that a bride would be legally absolved from all debts contracted under her maiden name by walking naked from her old to her new home.

In south Hunts, a bridegroom may be told that if he throws his trousers on to the bed both he and his wife may soon suffer pain; meaning that pregnancy will take place and he will share the pains (see above).

Cuthbert Bede notes in 1852 (N. & Q. 1st S. Vol. VI.) that it was a Huntingdonshire custom to honour a couple whose banns were put for the first time, with a peal of bells on the evening of the same day. This was called the "Spur Peal" and the day "Spur Sunday."

## DEATH AND BURIAL.

The tremendous significance and mystery of death to simple and primitive people will perpetuate many of the superstitions relating to it long after all other folk-beliefs have been forgotten. Some of the lesser known beliefs and practices found in the county are worth recording.

I have records of Coffin Paths from only two villages, but probably many more exist. These paths, along which coffins were taken to the church, were purposely used because they avoided the neighbourhood of houses and roads and crossed as few fields as possible. This was done to minimise the blighting effect of death on what was living and growing. The strength of the belief may be judged from the fact that in following the path the coffin had to be carried long distances on bearers' shoulders, instead of on a hearse or wagon along the road. Such a path is said to have existed between Gt. Paxton and Abbotsley. It was known as the Abbotsley Bier Balk and entered Great Paxton church by the now blocked north door. Why Abbotsley people should come to Gt. Paxton for burial is not explained.

Meeting Walk, leading from Bluntisham village to the church was another such path, avoiding houses and pre-enclosure fields.

In premonition of death there is still wide belief. The howling of a dog at night, the perching of a pigeon or other large bird on the roof top, or a bird flying into the house or against the window, are all signs of approaching death. Another omen is "a hole in the fire" (i.e. an unburnt place in the mass of red hot coals). A St. Neots lady told me that during the fortnight before her father's sudden death in 1931, the fires at the houses of three or four friends which she visited with him had holes in them.

Mysterious knockings (usually three knocks) on doors or windows, and falling pictures, are regarded as death omens. I was told of a picture falling in America at the precise moment of a near relative's death near St. Neots.

A badly folded table cloth which when opened out shows a diamond shape in the centre, is a similar omen.

The old custom of burying suicides at crossroads is recorded in the Hunts. Beds. and Peterborough Weekly Gazette of July 30th, 1814. An unknown man found dying from poison, self-administered, in Godmanchester Field, was buried at "the crossroads leading to Offord."

An amusing extract from the same journal of January 13th, 1816, shows that the pagan practice of placing food and drink in the grave was not then extinct. It runs as follows:—  
"The sexton of Yaxley in digging a grave broke through the side of a coffin and out fell a glass bottle which, from

the inscription on the gravestone, had been there for 27 years. The cork was drawn, and the contents proved to be excellent Old Stingo."

The following conversation is said to have taken place between two Huntingdonshire undertakers:

1st Undertaker. "Do they put sovereigns in coffins in your parts?"

2nd Undertaker. "Yes sometimes. Why do they do it?"

1st. U. "To pay the ferry over Jordan, I suppose."

2nd. U. "Then a good many will have to swim."

Cuthbert Bede notes the belief in 1852 (*N. & Q.* 1st S. Vol. V.) that the soul could not leave a person until a church bell had been rung over the corpse. This belief was expressed when sympathising with a mother whose unbaptised child was being buried without the church bell being rung.

Funeral customs surviving at Godmanchester until last century are interestingly told in the "Memorials of Godmanchester," by F. W. Bird.

The funeral of a young unmarried girl is thus described:—"White silk hat bands and white gloves were used by all the officials taking part. The breastplate, ornaments, and handles of the coffin were silver or silver washed. Four or six young women dressed in white, and supplied with white silk hoods for a head covering, carried the coffin slung in stout towels at full arms length. . . . The pall was black, trimmed with white silk.

On the death of a Freeman of the Borough, a new spade and shovel were purchased and placed, draped in black, outside the deceased's house; they remained there until after the funeral, and were then given to the sexton. The creped spade and shovel placed outside the house announced to the public that a death had occurred.

The well-to-do also had mutes to stand motionless outside their houses, holding wands bound with crepe. In addition to the mutes there were hatchments. These were armorial bearings of the deceased painted on canvas and framed in square or diamond frames of black wood. They were displayed outside the house of mourning. After hanging outside the house for a certain time, they were removed to the ground floor of the church belfry."

At St. Neots it is still usual to bury stillborn children or very young babies in white coffins.

Some Pre-Reformation burial customs in Huntingdonshire are revealed by a study of wills.

It was common to leave money to be spent in "dirige and mass" and for distribution among the poor on certain anniversaries of the testator's death. These include "every

month's day in one year following," "on my burying day, my 7th day, and my 30th day," "my month's day and my 20th day," and "at Lent for a space of 4 years." A number of such bequests are printed in my "History of Bluntisham and Earith" (Appendix).

The present day custom of all near relatives of a deceased person (whether churchgoers or not) attending church on the Sunday after the funeral, probably dates back to the pre-reformation Requiem Mass.

In Huntingdon Museum is an interesting relic of the late 18th century. This is a pointed oval shaped current bun, dried to the hardness of brick. It is of local origin and had been sent to the relatives who were not able to attend the funeral, in the same way that wedding cake is sent today.

#### DAILY LIFE.

It should be recorded that no trace of many of the practices and beliefs relating to houses have been noticed in this county. No ceremony is observed when a new house is built or people move into a new house, or light a new fire.

Times for sowing crops are still dictated by the phases of the moon in many places. Among allotment holders, Good Friday is the traditional day for setting the potato crop.

The harvest supper has not long died out, but the ceremonies connected with the last load are only remembered by the very old. An account from Eynesbury was given me by John Irons in 1937 and related to events in which he had taken part 80 years before. He told me that the last load was made into a small one on a wagon, and all the men and boys rode on top. Ash branches and boughs, (always *ash*) were set up all round like flags. On arrival at the farm they would drive round and round the home close singing songs or topical parodies made up for the occasion. Plenty of beer was given to everyone and in the evening the Harvest Supper was held.

Gleaning was regulated by the Gleaning Bell rung at 7 a.m. and 7 p.m. at St. Neots, and was only allowed between these times.

Mr. Bird gives a similar account from Godmanchester. He describes the last load, a small one, stuck round with green boughs and drawn by two horses in tandem. It was called the "harvest cart." The horses were gaily decked and caparisoned, and a ploughboy rode the leading one, bedizened with coloured ribbons and strange garments. Any children that were in the fields were gathered into the harvest cart, and so rode to the homestead, cheering. He says that in the neighbouring parishes water was thrown on the harvest cart as an omen of good luck for the farmer. The harvest supper followed at night for the men with their

wives and sweethearts. In 1870 (N. & Q. 4th S. Vol. VI.) Cuthbert Bede says this was known in Hunts. as the Horkey Supper. Following the Harvest Home at Godmanchester was a ceremony called "going a larging." The whole community was expected to give "largesse" to those who had got the harvest in for them. Those "going a larging" were not ungratefully received.

The doctoring of farm animals had many folk remedies. Evidence of this, up to 25 years ago, was to be seen in the Fen districts, where large herds of cattle were put out to feed on the rich grassland. Each bullock would be seen to have a short length of tarred cord threaded through a hole pierced in the dewlap and knotted at each end. This was said to prevent blackleg, but one old man told me it was done to disperse in the throat or stomach, the masses of spiders' web swallowed with the grass and likely to form harmful balls in the animal's inside.

The ploughman takes pride in managing his well-trained team, of sometimes as many as four horses, with a single rein. They are largely controlled by spoken directions. The form of these directions varies over quite small areas. At Bluntisham "Gee-up" starts them, "Gee-Hoh" turns them "orford" (to the right), "Woh-come-back" sends them "t'ward" (to the left), "Woh" stops them. A few miles to the east in the Fens, horses would not understand this language. At St. Neots the same words are used as at Bluntisham.

The date of harvest is still predicted as 9 weeks from the opening of the first wild rose.

Cuthbert Bede notes a number of farming sayings in Notes and Queries. If cows eat fallen leaves they are said to turn the milk bitter.

"Farmer's wives when leaves do fall,  
'Twill spoil your milk, and butter and all."  
(Vol. X. 2nd S. 1860).

"When the white pinks begin to appear,  
Then's the time your sheep to shear."  
(Vol. III. 4th S. 1869).

"Till St. Swithin's Day be past,  
Apples be not fit to taste."  
(Vol. VI. 4th S. 1870).

"Apples will never keep well unless  
St. Swithin rains on them."  
(Vol. VIII. 3rd S. 1865).

#### MASTER AND SERVANT.

The hiring of servants at annual fairs does not appear to have been much practised, or else was discontinued at an

1. In Stukeley the order was "walk-come-back."

early date. In the 1854 "History and Gazetteer of Hunts.," St. Neots is the only town mentioned as having a "Statute Fair" for hiring. This fair, still known as the "Statis," is held in the first week of September, but is now a pleasure fair only.

In the St. Neots Poor Law accounts of 1727 there is a record of a quarter's wages paid to a servant on St. Thomas Day.

#### HUNTING AND FISHING.

Fishing and fowling once played an important part in Huntingdonshire economy. They were less important after the successful drainage of the Fens. The art of making and using Duck Decoys was probably an introduction from the Continent in the 18th century. It flourished along the Fen edge for about a century, where the name Decoy Farm is still fairly common. Thousands of dead waterfowl were sent to London by coach, and the "goose carts" that hawked the small towns and villages are still remembered.

Lapwings and other birds of the plover kind were caught until recently, by spring nets. Usually a live decoy bird was placed on a small artificial island in shallow flood water on marsh or meadow land known to be frequented by these birds. Spring nets, lying flat on the ground and carefully concealed, were operated by the fowler in a distant hide. Flocks of plovers settling to the decoy were thus enmeshed.

Larks in large numbers, and sometimes snipe, were caught in Trandling Nets. These nets, which were 25 to 30 yards long and 4 yards wide were so light and fine that one could be wrapped in an old fashioned red handkerchief. They were carried fully extended horizontally on 14 foot poles by two men walking parallel to each other. The net was thus about 2 ft. 6 in. from the ground and on dark nights birds on the ground on seeing the net pass over them would fly up into it and be caught when it was dropped to the ground. These nets were also used by poachers to catch partridges.

Fishing was probably more important than fowling. In Domesday Book are recorded, what seems to us, enormous eel rents from manors bordering the Fen rivers. The eel traps plaited from split oziers and known as "hives" and "grigs," are undoubtedly of ancient origin. The eel spear or "gleve" must also have survived many centuries.

In the 17th century there are many complaints of the fishing weirs which held up the water and caused floods in the fens. These were apparently lines of stakes placed across rivers and against which nets could be fastened. Another net with cods, the width of the stream, was then dragged towards the weir, and the fish caught between the two.

Another important survival is the cast net. This is a circular net with weights round the circumference and secured by a line from the centre. The net is folded on the fisherman's left arm with the end of the line fastened to his right wrist. A great deal of skill is required to fling the net, by means of the right arm, out over the water so that it strikes the surface stretched out in a full circle. The leads quickly take the circumference of the net to the bottom, enclosing any fish covered by the throw, and are drawn together as the line hauls the net out of the water. Few men can now throw a cast net. The first few feet of the line, where it was likely to be continually wet, used to be made of twisted horse hair.

These, and all the above described nets and traps, were made by the fishermen and fowlers themselves. Their occupations, often part-time, were usually hereditary.

The craft used by the Fenland fishermen and fowler was the flat-bottomed "gun punt," usually 16 ft. long by 3 ft. 4 in. beam and sharply pointed at each end. It was propelled by a long pole, at one end shod with an iron shoe with two prongs, and having a short cross handle at the other end. A few still survive at such places as Earith.

#### FOODS.

Today variation in diet is chiefly a difference between town and country, but within living memory the food eaten varied greatly in different localities.

A few years ago John Irons at Eynesbury told me how he and his family lived as farm labourers between 1860 and 1870. Their meals were as follows:—

##### *Breakfast.*

This was taken at the farm, on arrival, at 6 a.m. and consisted of bread brought from home, to which was added milk supplied by the farmer. Sometimes "Toad in a hole" was made. This was a piece of lard put into a hole cut in a lump of bread.

##### *Lunch.*

Bread only eaten during a short interval at 9 a.m.

##### *Dinner.*

This was taken at the farm at 2 p.m. when the horses had finished work for the day. It consisted almost invariably of a dumpling made of flour, lard and onions, and a small piece of fat pork, boiled in a bag and brought from home, ready cooked. A kind farmer's wife would sometimes heat these up for the men on cold days and perhaps give them some hot soup as well. This was only the water in which meat or vegetables had been boiled. My informant remembered throwing frozen dumplings against the barn wall to soften

them. In bad times when meat was dear the piece of pork was sometimes even brought home each day to flavour, the next day's dumpling, and so on until the end of the week.

#### *Supper.*

This was eaten by the family altogether, at home. On most days it was only bread and lard with vegetables and, perhaps, one red herring to divide amongst 2 or 3 persons. Occasionally a small joint of meat was cooked on Sunday. No butter was ever eaten. The bread was made at home once a week and taken to the baker to be baked. It was in large flat round loaves and kept fresh for a week. It was made with flour from gleaned wheat thrashed indoors at home with a small stick (not a flail) and then sieved out of doors (often on the Green) when it was windy. The corn was then taken to Duloe windmill or Eaton Socon water-mill to be ground, the miller keeping the bran as payment.

It should be noted that this diet comes from an eminently arable part of the county. Very different food was probably eaten near the more pastoral fen edge. Dairy products and utensils play a large part in some of the Inventories of the 17th and 18th centuries at Earith, and probably the same was true in many other parts of the county before the Inclosures and the changes leading up to them. One important change was the discontinuance of hard cheese making.

#### BELIEFS CONCERNING FOOD.

From the Ramsey district comes the belief that when a pig is killed, no woman must, during her menstrual period, assist in the salting or preparation of the meat. If this precaution is disregarded the meat will not keep.

#### FARM IMPLEMENTS.

Farm implements peculiar to this county are few. There is however, in the extreme south, the wooden plough with elm wood mould boards still in use. It is considered particularly suitable for the heavy clay land and can be used when the ground is too wet for the ordinary iron plough. St. Ives Museum has a specimen of this plough.

The breast plough or paring iron was once used for cutting turfs, and cesses from the peat fen. It is well illustrated in Bowen's 18th century Map of the Fenland. A number of specialised spades were also used for this purpose.

The earliest Huntingdonshire wagons still existing are the pin sided variety with upright iron and wooden rods to support the sides. Some still being used are probably a hundred years old. They were succeeded by the plank sided wagons without upright rods. Few, if any, wagons have been made since 1914.

Of farm carts still in use the "tumbrel" is the more ancient type. This was mostly superseded by the "scotch cart" by the end of the 19th century. The scotch cart is usually decorated with a design on the front known as "spectacles." In well made carts the front is double boarded and the design cut out of the front thickness. The design often varies from the original, but never so much that its origin cannot be seen. Sometimes it is simply painted on a single boarded front.

After considerable research I have concluded that the scotch cart was an introduction from Scotland in the latter half of the 19th century, and that the spectacle design came with it. It was being made at Ayr during that period. Whatever significance the design had in the north, it would appear to have had none here except as the trade mark of a new and more efficient type of cart. A trademark that pleased the eye of both wheelwright and farmer.

#### POPULAR PASTIMES.

Rhymes and nicknames attached to certain villages or localities were once common, but most of them are now forgotten. Most were intended to be insulting or contemptuous or perpetuated the memory of some event which exposed the village so named to ridicule. Fen dwellers were known as "fen tigers," or "yellow bellies," and were said to be born with webbed or "flood" feet. Five adjacent villages were thus designated. "Bluntisham runners, Earith gunners, Somersham suck eggs, Colne noodles, Needingworth greeks." This last name was said to have been gained when, after one of the great fires that devastated Needingworth in the last century, a party of men came on an appetising meal in the shape of a calf roasted by the fire. After eating it they discovered by its hoofs that it was a donkey! Donkeys being assumed to be the popular food of the Greeks.

"Pickpocket penny nail,  
Lock him up in Colne jail."

This local rhyme was a catch for strangers who did not know that Colne, being governed by the Court Leet of Somersham Manor, had no lock-up of its own.

#### GAMES AND DANCING.

Traditional adult outdoor games are few, but some are of interest. That wrestling and fencing were once practised and appreciated by the public is witnessed by the tomb in Bluntisham churchyard of Adrian Lucas, who died in 1671. It bears the inscription:—

“ Here lyes the conqueror conquered.  
 Valiant as ever England bred.  
 Whom neither art, nor steel nor strength,  
 Could e'er subdue, till Death at length  
 Threw him on his back, and here he lies  
 And hopes hereafter to arise.”

The agricultural labourer worked too hard and too long to be interested in field sports except in special circumstances. These circumstances were provided in the fens when sharp and prolonged frost (which gave him an enforced holiday) provided the opportunity for skating on large areas and long distances of ice. It is therefore not surprising that, until the introduction of the Norwegian type of racing skate, the fen champions on their “pattens” with upward curving points, were unbeatable. Since the 18th century at least, skating matches have been held on such places as Bury Fen Bluntisham, and Portholme Huntingdon, and have always attracted great crowds. The game of hockey, or “shinny” as it was called in this county, was popular with older boys and it was often played on the roads with adjacent villages as goals. No rules were recognised save the right to hit ones opponent's shins if he tackled from the left. At Bluntisham and Earith, where large stretches of ice were often available in winter, it was a short step to transfer this game to the ice. Naturally-bent willow branches were sought for as sticks, and the village tailor sewed together cloth scraps to make the balls. Thus the game of Bandy was invented, probably sometime in the 18th century, and the Bury Fen team, drawn from the villages of Bluntisham and Earith, claimed to have remained unbeaten for a hundred years. This game, later introduced by Bury Fen players to most of the northern European countries, is now most popular in its potted form as Ice Hockey.

The origin of the fen type of skate has not been definitely traced, old local surviving specimens in St. Ives Museum belong to the 18th century. Skating was said to have been popularised in England by the Stuarts returning from the Low Countries at the Restoration, but it is significant that the fenman uses the name pattens which is of French origin, rather than skates which is derived from the Dutch or Scandinavian. The word patten was used as the name of the iron-shod clogs at one time commonly used for walking about in the muddy roads and yards. On the other hand a locally made skate, which I found in a remote Icelandic farm house, is more like the Fenland type than any other from elsewhere in Europe. This skate is in the St. Ives Museum, and may be compared with old fen types there.

The game of “Four Pins” died out about 1917. It was a kind of skittles and was always played at public houses at

fair time in such places as Wood Walton, Wistow and Upwood. The "pins" were of elm chopped out into an elongated fir-cone shape, about 2 feet high with a 6 in. base. Four of these were set in the corners of a 4 ft. 6 in. square set diagonally to the players. The "cheeses" that were thrown underhand at the pins, were made of some such hardwood as *lignum vitæ*, and were shaped like curling stones. A set of three sometimes varied from the standard size of 10 ins. by 3 ins. The players tried to knock down as many pins as possible in three shots, nine being a possible maximum.

Children's games, known to have been played by many generations of youth, are now fast dying out. Conkers, marbles and tops were played in their seasons by the boys. Hop Scotch is still played by the girls, the specially selected flat stones being kept from year to year. A simpler form of this game, played at St. Neots on squares marked out in alternate naughts and crosses, is called "Tip-tap-toe." Skipping with all its variations seems to have temporarily died out.

Prisoners' Base used to be a popular boys' game at Eynesbury until motor traffic made it impossible. Equal numbers gathered in marked out bases on either side of the street. They took prisoner any of the opposing side they could catch venturing out. Prisoners would be rescued if their friends could get across and reach them without being caught.

A girl's singing game was recently played at Eynesbury by a ring of children dancing round a child in the centre and singing,

"The wind, the wind, the wind blows high.

The rain comes tumbling (or chattering) down the sky,

She is handsome, she is pretty,

She is a girl from the royal city.

She is courting, one, two three.

Pray can you tell me who is he?

(Ring closes in and whispers a boy's name to the girl  
in the ring)

Alas poor . . . . . (name of girl in the ring) she must die.

Then poor . . . . . (name of boy) he will cry.

He will follow her to the grave,

With black buttons down his side.

As the song ends the dancing stops abruptly, and the girl left facing the one in the ring, has then to take her place.

Games played by Bluntisham children 70 years ago are described in my "History of Bluntisham." They included marbles, tops, knuckle bones, hod-me-dod, high-cock-alorum, hare and hounds, shinny, hoops and stilts.

Cuthbert Bede records the names of the following games

played at Glatton in 1854 (N. & Q. Vol X. 1st S.) "I Spy," "Tick," "Here we go round the mulberry bush," "Thread the needle," "What have I apprenticed my son to," and "Blind man's buff."

In most parts of Huntingdonshire large stones are rare, and perhaps for this reason the occasional large erratic boulders that turn up in excavations are treated as objects of interest, and almost of reverence. People will go to great trouble to cart these stones to their gardens. One such stone marks the St. Neots U.D.C. boundary on the road to Little Barford. It formerly lay in Walnut Tree Square, St. Neots, and was once rolled into the Hen Brook by practical jokers, but recovered by the owner of the Square at great trouble and expense. In Bluntisham Wood End is a black boulder protecting the corner of a cottage at the entrance to Noble Land. Village children used to be told "that if they put their ears to the stone they would hear all the cocks in Egypt crow," and "when the stone turned over it could hear the church bells ring."

My father was told as a boy that the following inscription was cut on the base of the Abbots Chair, or Hursting-stone, on the St. Ives to Oldhurst road.

"Turn me up and read me plain  
Hot porridge makes hard crusts soft  
And turn me back again."

Recent examination has proved that there has been no inscription of any sort on this stone, which however is known to have marked the site of the Hundred Moot of that part of the county.

A well-known county rhyme runs (there are other variations):

"Glatton round hill  
Yaxley stone mill  
And Whittlesey Mere  
Are the three wonders of Huntindgonshire."

It is of interest that when the small brick tower windmill known as the Black Mill on the south side of the Yaxley to Norman Cross road was pulled down in 1935, it was found to have foundation courses of Barnack stone arranged in such fashion as to show that on them once stood the most ancient type of post mill. It also had the rare feature of a stone walled cellar, from which, tradition said, an underground passage ran to Yaxley Church.

Another old rhyme concerns a number of local monasteries, and must date back at least to the Dissolution.

Ramsey the rich of gold and of fee,  
 Thorney the bane of many a fair tree,  
 Crowland the courteous of their meat and their drink,  
 Spalding the gluttons as all men do think,  
 Peterborough the proud as all men do say,  
 Sawtry by the way that poor abbaye,  
 Gave more alms in one day than all they.

The way that brought so many poor travellers to Sawtry was Ermine Street, or, as we now call it, the Great North Road.

The well-known riddle "As I was going to St. Ives I met a man with seven wives, each wife had seven sacks, each sack had seven cats, each cat had seven kits,—kits, cats, man and wives, how many were there going to St. Ives?" most probably refers to the Huntingdonsshire town and may date back to the time of the great St. Ives Fair of the 13th century.

An old saying which it is difficult to explain runs:—"You must go to Old Weston before you die."

This is not a musical county, and probably few folk songs have their origin here. There may however be an exception in the following, all too short, lullaby from Great Gransden. Perhaps there were once other verses.

"Loo the pups now  
 The boys have gone to plough  
 So if you want to loo the pups  
 Let baby loo them now."

The use of the sound "Loo" preceding a dog's name when wishing to encourage it in hunting for game or vermin, is I believe strictly local.

It is definitely a huntsman's call and seems to be a corruption of the French "loup! loup!" (wolf! wolf!).

Of local dances the Yelling Bobbing Dance is the only one of which I have heard. Notes of this are said to have been taken for the Eastern Counties Folklore Society, but unfortunately their records are not available during the War.

#### CALENDAR CUSTOMS.

##### PLOUGH MONDAY.

The ceremonies connected with the 2nd Monday of January have only recently died out and will be remembered by many. They ranked high in village interest. An old man in my employ on being asked on which day of the month he was born, was only able to say it was the Wednesday after Plough Monday.

The central feature of the ceremony was the drawing round, from door to door, of an old plough by plough-boys

disguised by blackened faces and coats turned inside out. Cuthbert Bede has an interesting note of one dressed in a cowskin (N. & Q. 7th S. Vol. I., 1886). Those taking part were called Plough Witches and the ceremony Plough Witching. Money was expected from all houses visited, and in some cases, if this was refused, door-steps were ploughed up or furrows drawn in front of the door. Households expecting to be visited often got their share of the fun by heating coins to give the Plough Witches. At each door a song was sung, usually descriptive of the ploughboy's life.

In "A Calendar of Hunts," (Cambridge University Library 8460, d. 130<sup>2</sup>) of about 1840, there is noted, "Plough Monday is celebrated by bringing out an old plough, attached to it are long ropes and it is pulled through the streets by boys called Plough Witches. In some parts an imitation Morris Dance takes place by ploughmen in white garb decorated with rosettes."

F. W. Bird writes of Godmanchester about 1850, "Plough Monday was a great institution at Godmanchester. Farming men, many of them dressed as women and having their faces besmeared, paraded the streets. Not content with assuming grotesque costumes and bedaubed faces, they stuffed bundles of straw between their shoulders which gave them a hunch back appearance . . . They dragged a wooden plough behind them, and men, all more or less hideously attired, accompanied the procession with money boxes. They halted at all the principal houses of the town and asked for "toll," pedestrians being solicited as they were encountered. If nothing was forthcoming from a call, rumour said that the plough witches made no more ado but forthwith ploughed up the front part of the house and departed, but no such damage was remembered at Godmanchester."

He further notes that the Godmanchester men were peculiar in carrying besoms which he considered was to give reality to their character as witches.

"At Ramsey" says Mr. Bird, "the Plough Witches were not so pacific, but would often march out to Benwick, or the Benwick Witches to Ramsey, and severe encounters often took place."

I have been told that in St. Neots about 1880 men used to dress up in bright clothes, black their faces and dance in a ring in the High Street, singing songs.

A number of different songs seem to have been sung on this occasion, at least three in the St. Neots district. At Great Gransden the following was sung to the accompaniment of tea tray music:—

“Remember us poor Plough Boys,  
 A ploughing we must go.  
 Whether its rain, blow, hail or snow,  
 A ploughing we must go.  
 Jack, fetch my horses from out the stable  
 Oh Sir, I am not able,  
 Able or not the job must be done,  
 So strike up Bob and John.”

From Kimbolton I collected the following:—

“A hole in my stocking  
 A hole in my shoe  
 Will you spare a poor Plough boy  
 A copper or two,  
 If you haven't got a penny  
 A ha'penny will do,  
 If you haven't got that  
 Then God bless you.

Mr. Papworth of Ramsey Mereside told me he used to sing a ballad that seems to be a variation of “Barbara Allen.”

I have been able to get another complete song and air as sung both at St. Neots and Yelling. It is given as written out by Mr. Herbert Hill of Yelling, who has lived there all his life of 70 years, and worked on the land from the age of 12.

PLOUGH MONDAY. YELLING.



1. Early one morn at the break of the day  
 When the cocks were all crowing the farmer did say  
 Come rise my good fellows, come rise with good will  
 For your horses want something their bellies to fill.
2. When 4 o'clock comes boys then us we must rise  
 And into the stable so merrily fly  
 With rubbing and scrubbing our horses I'll vow  
 That we're all jolly fellows that follow the plough.

3. When 6 o'clock comes boys then breakfast we'll meet,  
With beef, bread and pork boys, so heartily eat,  
With a piece in our pockets I'll swear and I'll vow  
That we're all jolly fellows that follow the plough.
4. Then we'll harness our horses and away we will go  
To trip o'er the plain boys so nimble and bold,  
And when we get there boys so jolly and bold  
We'll see which of us a straight furrow can hold.
5. Our master came to us, and to us did say,  
What are you been doing all this long day,  
For you're not ploughed an acre I'll swear and I'll vow  
That you're all idle fellows that follow the plough
6. I stepped up to him and I made this reply  
Oh Master. Oh Master, you're told a darn lie  
For we've all ploughed an acre I'll swear and I'll vow  
That we're all jolly fellows that follow the plough.
7. He then turned his head and he laughed at the joke,  
It's past 2 o'clock boys and time to unyoke,  
So unharness your horses and rub them down well  
And I'll give you a cup of my bonny best ale.

#### STRAW BEAR TUESDAY.

This most interesting ceremony seems to have been confined to the fenland part of the county about Ramsey and Whittlesey. It took place on the day following Plough Monday.

Bird writes "On the day following Plough Monday there was Strawbower Day, when those who had been Witches paraded the town clad from head to foot in straw and in that guise solicited toll in alms. But this latter custom did not prevail at Godmanchester."

Cuthbert Bede (N. & Q. 7th S. Vol. I., 1886) notes a reference in the Peterborough Advertiser of January 16 1886, to the Straw Bear at Ramsey on Plough Monday, and adds that he never saw it in his part of the county.

Mr. Papworth of Ramsey Mereside who had often participated in this ceremony described it to me thus. "Great lengths of tightly twisted straw bands were prepared and the boy chosen was completely wound up in them, arms and legs separately. Two sticks fastened to his shoulders met in a point above his head and the straw was wound up on to them to form a cone above the "bear's" head. The face was quite covered and he could hardly see. A tail was provided and a strong chain fastened round his armpits. On approaching a house the "bear" would go down on his hands and knees and growl and groan as the door was opened, while those accompanying him would pretend to

check him by pulling at the chain and by blows with a light stick. It was great fun frightening servant girls, and on one occasion a girl strange to the district fainted. A collection was made for the 'Straw Bear.'

#### ST. VALENTINE'S DAY.

On this day children at Great Grausden used to go round with bunches of catkins singing:—

“ Good morrow to you Valentine  
 Curl your locks as I do mine  
 A bush behind and a bush before,  
 Hear me Valentine at your door.”

#### SHROVE TUESDAY.

The pleasant custom of eating pancakes on this day is unlikely to die out. The "Pancake Bell" used to be rung at St. Neots (until 1914) and at Glatton for ten minutes at 11 a m.

#### PALM SUNDAY.

At St. Neots it is still the custom to make a fig pudding on this day, and shops get in extra supplies for the occasion.

#### GOOD FRIDAY.

This is the recognised day for planting potatoes. Cuthbert Bede records that furrnety was always sold at Standground on the morning of this day (N. & Q. 7th S. Vol. I., 1886).

#### EASTER SUNDAY.

It is considered lucky and indeed proper (particularly for women) to wear something new on this day.

#### MAY DAY.

As elsewhere, May Day was a great day, and although it is not now a general holiday, some of the traditional ceremonies still survive in a few villages where children carry round garlands and sing versions of the old songs. These are genuine survivals and show no sign of the artificial revivals that have taken place in a few other villages.

Perhaps the most complete account of a typical May Day is given by Cuthbert Bede (N. & Q. Vol. X., 1854 and Vol. IX., 3rd S. 1866). He describes the garland as of pyramidal shape composed of crown imperials, tulips, anemonies, cowslips, kingcups, daffodils, meadow orchids, wallflowers, primroses, lilac, laburnum, roses and other bright flowers. Large green boughs were used in its construction which attained a height of 6 feet. On the front of the garland was placed a gaily dressed doll to represent Flora. The village

youths and maidens hung brightly coloured ribbons and pieces of silk and other finery round the already gorgeous garland, which was carried round the village in the May Day procession by the two maids of honour to the May Queen. He then describes minutely the gay dresses of the May Queen and her attendants and the procession. With the proceeds collected, all sat down to tea at 3 o'clock. After tea a cord was drawn from chimney to chimney across the village street, and the garland and doll suspended in the middle. Balls were then thrown backwards and forwards over the rope and garland, and if the doll was damaged by a bad shot it was no more than she might expect by placing herself in such a dangerous position! Afterwards other games were played until it was time for bed. Such was May Day at Glatton nearly one hundred years ago. The song sung by the procession is given below, it contains most of the versions still used or remembered in the county.

1. Here comes to us poor Mayers all  
For here do we begin  
To lead a life of righteousness  
Lest we should die in sin.
2. To die in sin what a sad thing it is  
To go where sinners mourn  
For it had been better for our poor souls  
If we had never been born.
3. We have been rambling through the night  
And part of the next day  
And now we have returned back again  
We have brought you a branch of May.
4. A branch of May it looks so gay  
Before your door it stands  
Its only a sprout but its well budded out  
By the work of the Almighty's hand.
5. Awake, awake my pretty young maids  
And take your May bush in  
Or it will be gone by tomorrow's morn  
And you'll say we brought you none.
6. Awake, awake my pretty young maids  
Out of your drowsey dream  
And step into your dairies all  
And fetch us a cup of cream.
7. If its only a cup of your sweet cream  
And a mug of your brown beer  
And if we should have to tarry in the town  
We'll call another year.

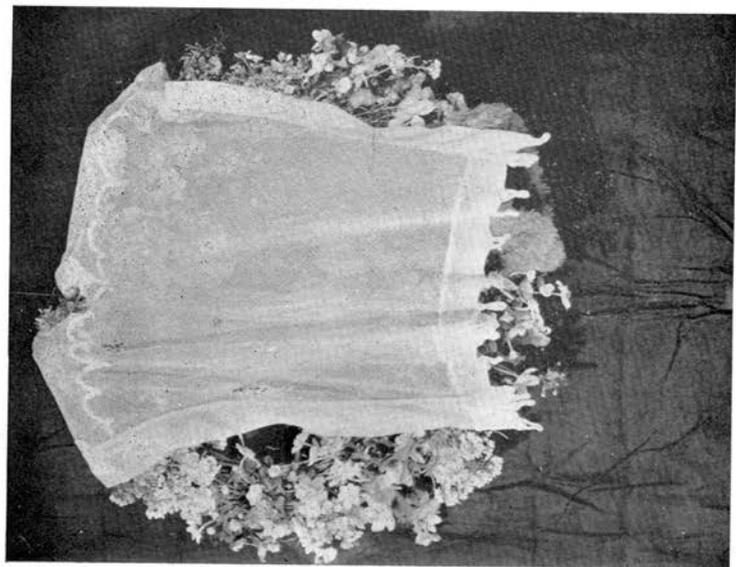
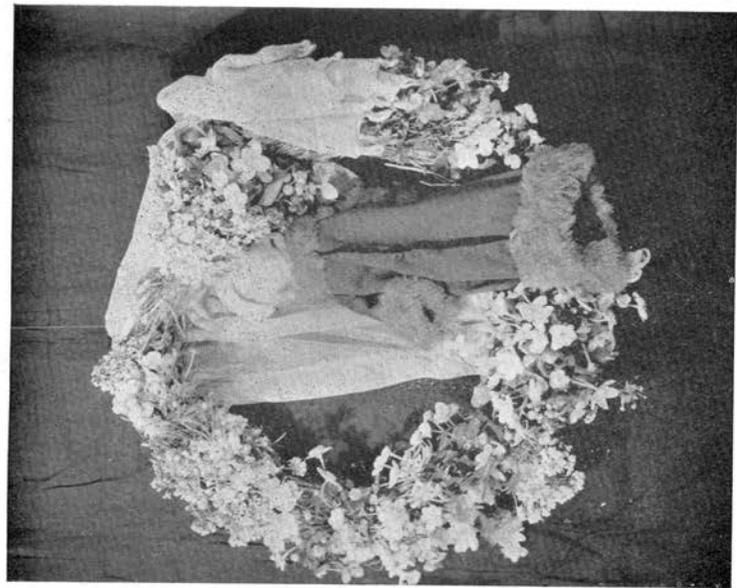
8. Repent, repent ye wicked men  
Repent before you die  
There's no repentance to be had  
When in the grave you lie.
9. The life of man is but a span  
It flourishes as a flower  
Today we're here, tomorrow we're gone  
We're all gone in an hour.
10. Now take a bible in your hand  
And read a chapter through  
And when the day of judgement comes  
The Lord will think of you.
11. The nightingale he sings at night  
The cuckoo she sings by day  
So fare you well we must be gone  
And we wish you a happy May.

At Eynesbury<sup>1</sup> girls of school age, in twos, threes or fours, still go from house to house with a garland made on a framework of one or two wooden hoops with a doll hung in the centre. The garland is usually composed of wild flowers only, cowslips, kingcups, buttercups, cuckoo-flowers, blackthorn, and always hawthorn if it is in bloom. The doll is carefully veiled with a piece of lace curtain, and only shown when a contribution is made. The song sung consists of verses 1, 2, 10, of the Glatton song with the additional ending of:—



We have a purse, a pretty little purse  
Tied up with a silken string.  
And all it wants is a little piece of silver  
To line it well within.

1. This custom was also kept up in Huntingdon within the last few years.



A MAY DAY GARLAND FROM ST. NEOTS.  
*Block kindly lent by The Cambridge Antiquarian Society.*

Our song's begun and almost done  
 We can no longer stay  
 So please to remember the money, money box  
 Before we go away.<sup>1</sup>

On May 1st, 1934, I met five children in Great Paxton in fancy dress carrying a garland and singing a shortened version of the Glatton song.

Upton children were bringing round garlands in 1940, and singing the following song:—

The seeds of love and sweet nightingale  
 Upon the sweetest summer time,  
 In the middle of the morn  
 A pretty damsel I espied  
 The fairest ever born.

Blow away the morning dew  
 The dew, the dew,  
 How sweet the morning dew  
 How sweet the winds did blow.

She gathered to her lovely flowers  
 And spent her time in sport  
 As if in pretty cupid's bowers  
 She gaily did resort.  
 Blow, etc.

The yellow cowslip by the brim  
 The daffodil as well  
 The timid primrose pale and trim  
 The pretty snowdrop bell.  
 Blow, etc.

And ever as she did  
 Those pleasant flowers pull  
 She raised her up and fetched a sigh  
 And wished her apron full.  
 Blow, etc.

From Buckworth come two songs (circa 1900). One is similar to the Eynesbury song with the addition of the Glatton verse 5. The second is of other origin.

Hail, hail, hail thou merry month of May  
 We will hasten to the woods away  
 Among the flowers so sweet and gay.  
 Then away to hail the merry merry May  
 The merry merry May,  
 Then away to hail the merry, merry month of May.

1. See also Camb. Antiq. Soc. Com., Vol. XXXII.

Hark, hark, hark to hail the month of May  
 How the songsters warble on the spray  
 And we will be as blythe as they  
 Then away to hail the merry merry May  
 The merry, merry May.

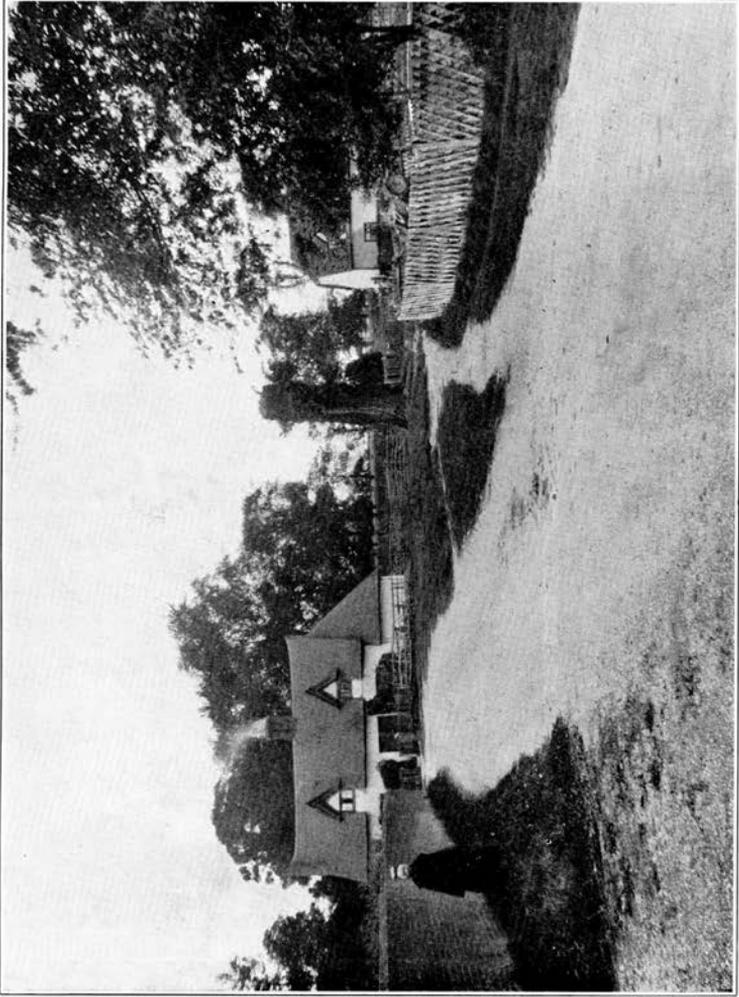
A curious feature of the Glatton ceremonies, was the suspension of the garland over the village street, and the throwing of balls over and even through it. At Bluntisham, Fenstanton and Ramsey Mereside, this part of the celebrations was all that survived to within living memory. At Bluntisham the boys stood on one side of the garlanded hoop and the girls on the other, and tried to return the balls through the hoop; no doll is remembered. At Ramsey Mereside a bullock's eye was once hung in the hoop.

In the Glatton song there is mention of May Bushes, a May Day custom common to most of North Europe. In 1935 Arthur Rowlatt of Easton, then 89, told me that when he was a boy, young men used to cut large bunches of hawthorn, called May Bushes, and fasten them, early on May morning, in front of their sweethearts' bedroom windows, so that they saw them directly on waking. The Easton children, after parading their garlands, would hang them up on a tree in a field near his house and dance before them.

At Great Gransden, on the eve of May Day, it used to be the custom for young farm labourers to cut hawthorn boughs and carry a bundle into the village leaving some at almost every house, making the number of boughs left correspond to the number of lads and lassies in the house. This distribution was carried out to the accompaniment of the "Night Song." On the following evening (of May Day itself) the hawthorn gatherers made another round singing a May Day song outside each house where boughs had been left. One of the party wore a white shirt over his clothes, with ribbons attached and was called the "May Lord," another dressed as a girl, was the "May Lady" or "Mary." One of the procession carried a handkerchief tied to a pole as a flag, and all wore ribbons in their hats.

Gransden maidens are said to have hung May branches up on a signpost on May Day Eve, and according to which way they were blown in the morning, were able to tell from which direction their lovers would come. If the branch had blown away, no admirer could be expected.

At Godmanchester, according to Bird, May Day was celebrated on Stocking Day, which was May 13th (probably owing to the change in the calendar). At 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, the cow boy of each common perambulated the town blowing a cow's horn, and all stock was on the



LITTLE PAXTON VILLAGE. THE MAYPOLE.

common by 5 or 6 o'clock. May Bushes were hung in the streets, and in the evening parties and suppers were held.

At Earith May Day was connected with the important May Fair, where cattle and horses were bought to turn out on the rich fen summer grazings. To the pleasure seekers a feature of the fair was the gingerbread, gilded and made in wooden moulds to represent the figures of kings and queens. These were known as "gingerbread husbands" and as such were often bought in jest or mockery and offered to girls without sweethearts. The local writer of a letter dated 1819 states that he would rather a lady of his acquaintance had a gingerbread husband than marry Mr. X. There can be little doubt that these figures once had a fertility significance.

Cuthbert Bede records (N. & Q. Vol. XII., 3rd S., 1867) that it was the custom at Warboys for the poor to be allowed to go into Warboys Wood on May morning to gather sticks, and suggests that originally this was the custom of gathering "May dew" so condemned by puritan writers of the 17th century for its immorality. It is possible that the Buckworth songs, given above, may refer to this custom.

Memories of actual maypoles in the county are few. The name 'Maypole Square' in Alconbury testifies to the existence, of one, and another undoubtedly stood in front of the Post Office at Little Paxton in the form of a tall straight elm tree (see illustration). Miss Ethel Ladds, who was born in Little Paxton, wrote, on enquiry, "I remember the old tree very well, it was always called 'the Maypole,' but I do not know any more about it, except that they used to dance round it." It seems to have disappeared about 1897.

Words and music of the Peterborough May Day song are given in Fenland Notes and Queries (Part 72, 1907).

**BEATING THE BOUNDS.** (Mon, Tues., Wed. before Ascension Day).

The useful and healthy custom of "Beating the Bounds" on one of the Rogation Days, mostly died out with the Inclosure, when a large scale map of the parish was prepared by the Inclosure Commissioners. It still survives, or has been revived in a few places, (e.g. Houghton, St. Neots and Eynesbury). It was often known as "processioning," and at Bluntisham, and probably other places, there is a "Processioning Charity," consisting of lands in the hands of the churchwardens, from the rent of which refreshment used to be provided for those taking part in the ceremony. This name no doubt dates from the time when the Incumbent headed a procession round the boundaries and blessed the crops.

A hint of a perambulation ceremony of more remote origin is given in an account of the beating of the bounds of the borough of Huntingdon in the Reliquary of October, 1892. If the record is correct, this event would appear to have taken place in September. It runs as follows (From Daily Papers, 16th September). "The Freemen of Huntingdon this week observed a curious and ancient custom. All Freemen and their sons assembled in the market place. The skull of an ox on two poles was placed at the head of the procession, then came the freemen and their sons, a certain number with spades and others sticks. They gave three cheers and moved out of the town to the borough boundary, then lowered the skull and dragged it along the line of the boundary like a plough. They dug the boundary holes afresh and a boy was thrown into each hole and struck with a spade. At the spot called Blackstone Leys refreshments were provided and the boys competed for prizes. The skull being raised aloft they returned to the Market Place, three cheers were given and the meeting broke up."

A good account of "Beating the Bounds" at Ramsey in 1794 is given in Fenland Notes and Queries (Part 51, 1901).

#### OAK APPLE DAY. (May 29th).

In a few villages (e.g. Sawtry) it is still the custom for children to wear oak leaves, with, if possible, an oak apple attached, on this day. They carry also a nettle to sting all those whom they meet without oak leaves. This custom is part of the May festivals and can be identified with ancient tree worship and the cult of the "Green Man," "Robin Hood" or "Charles in the Oak."

#### MIDSUMMER.

There is little evidence of the observance of this festival in the county, but enough to show that it had once been kept.

At Bluntisham a feast used to be held on Midsummer Day in a part of the village called Little London. Stalls selling sweets and gingerbread were set up and a garlanded hoop was said to have been hung over the street. This latter feature may have been a confusion of memories of May Day. The Rev. J. Rumpff, the Rector (1859-1897) used to organise sports for the children and distribute sweets.

Hints of more primitive customs come from Waresley in 1679, and are reprinted in my Extracts from the Assize Rolls of Huntingdonshire. It would seem that on the evening of Midsummer Day, blank charges were being fired from guns by people in the Pound to scare other people at play on the Green. The firing of guns was the well-known feature of

this festival and was intended to scare fairies and evil spirits who held sway on this one day of the year (see Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*):

NOVEMBER 5th. BONFIRE DAY.

Guy Fawkes and the Gunpowder Plot are still celebrated by bonfires and fireworks. But long before 1605 bonfires were lighted on All Hallows' eve, and it would seem that the later celebrations took the place of the earlier ones, the latter being forgotten. I know several men christened Guy, because they were born on this day.

NOVEMBER 23rd. ST. CLEMENT'S DAY.

Within living memory it was the custom on this day for all bricklayers and blacksmith's men to go round to their masters' customers and collect "Clem Money" to be spent in jollification in the evening.

NOVEMBER 25th. ST. CATHERINE'S DAY.

Similarly on this day collections used to be made by wheelwrights and carpenters, who claimed St. Catherine (because of her wheel) as their patron.

THE CHRISTMAS MUMMERS.

I have records of several places where plays were performed during Christmas Week.

In 1871 Cuthbert Bede writes from Glatton (N. & Q. Vol. VII, 4th S.) "The Christmas Mummings came to my house during Christmas week, and acted the old masque of George and the Dragon, with the characters of Bold Buonapart, the Turkish Knight, Little Jack, Devildoubt, and the Doctor. The party of boys who performed were costumed for the occasion and went through the piece with much spirit. They had been orally taught the words, which differed slightly from versions I had heard in Worcestershire and elsewhere." (See 2nd S. Vol. X., XI., XII.; 3rd S. Vol. I, IV.). Mr. G. Allen, of Conington, probably the last survivor of the Huntingdonshire Mummings, gave this account of the Christmas Morris Dance, last performed about 1900. It was performed by youths and men at Great Gidding, Glatton, Conington, Wood Walton and Sawtry, twice at each place.

No. 1 (wearing crown) "In comes I, I've never been before,  
A few more actors are at your door.  
By your leave, we will step in,  
We can both fiddle, dance and  
sing."

Beelzebub (with club) "In come I, Beelzebub,  
Under my arm I carry a club."

- Jumping Jack (hump on back) "In come I, old Jumping Jack,  
With my wife and family at my  
back."
- Mrs. Jack (in women's enters and quarrels with her hus-  
clothes) band.  
Beelzebub knocks Jack on the back with his  
club and knocks him down.
- No. 1. "Five pounds for a Doctor!"  
(Beelzebub opens door where stands the  
Doctor).
- Doctor. "Are you a Doctor?"
- No. 1. "Yes, I'm a Doctor."
- Doctor. "What pains can you cure?"
- No. 1. "The sick, the palsy, and the gout,  
If the devil is in you, I can fetch  
him out."
- Doctor. "Try your skill."
- No. 1. "By your consent so I will."  
(Stoops over J.J. and gives him a draught from  
a small bottle he carries in his waistcoat pocket).
- No. 1. "This young man is not dead  
So raise him up, he's in a trance,  
So raise him up, we'll have a dance."
- No. 1. "If he can dance, we will sing,  
So raise him up and we will begin."  
Music then plays and they start dancing to the  
tune of "My mother said I never should  
play with the gypsies in the wood."

Possibly they sang the song, the last line of which ran—  
"My mother said if I did, she'd knock me down with the  
tea-pot lid."

All the performers had coloured paper ribbons stitched  
on their clothes.

At Great Gransden a very garbled version of a masque is  
remembered. Boys with blackened faces and armed with  
sticks would follow a leader with a tin tray strapped to his  
back, a club over his shoulder and a tin can fastened under  
his nose. At each door they would chant:

"Here comes old Hub  
Over his shoulder he carries a club  
Under his nose a dripping pan  
Don't you think him a handsome man."

Yelling, singing and beating on the tray would then con-  
tinue until a coin was given by the householder.

#### WEATHER SIGNS.

Weather signs are very numerous and only a few can be  
given. Jackdaws sitting on the topmost pinnacles of St.

Neots Church, a dog eating grass, or the calling of the cuckoo's mate (the Gt. Green Woodpecker), are signs of rain. Killing a beetle is said to cause rain. While the smallest patch of snow lies in a sheltered place there is the danger of other snow coming to it. At Earith, thunder in March is said to be a sure forerunner of floods in May.

Cuthbert Bede records the following, in *Notes & Queries*, from the Glatton district. A cat eating grass, or crows tumbling in the sky are sure signs of rain within 24 hours: (Vol. 2, 3rd Sec., 1862). If the first three days of April be foggy there will be floods in June. (Vol. XII, 2nd S., 1861). If St. Paul's Day be fine it will be a fine Spring. (Vol. IX, 3rd S., 1866). If the wind be N.W. at Martinmas (Nov. 11th), a somewhat severe winter will follow. If it be S.S.W. at Martinmas it will keep mainly in the same quarter until Old Candelmas (Feb. 14th), and the winter will be mild with no snow. (Vol. V., 4th S., 1870). Whatever the weather on Holy Thursday it will be the opposite on Whit Monday. (Vol. I., 4th S., 1868). At Great Gransden a dripping Valentine's Day ensures a good year for beans and peas. As in most places, St. Swithin's Day weather is said to persist for 40 days and nights.

#### DIVINATIONS AND SPELLS.

Many sayings and rhymes are still quoted when events happen that are said to foretell the future. A large number could no doubt be collected. I have notes of the following. Sneezing: "Once a wish, twice a kiss, three times a letter, four times something better." A dropped knife means a man is coming to visit you, if a fork is dropped it indicates a woman. White flecks in one's nails are interpreted as follows: On the thumb, a gift; on the first finger, a friend is coming; on the second finger, a foe; on the third finger, a lover; and the fourth finger, a journey to go. A bee coming indoors indicates visitors coming. It is believed at Ramsey that bad luck may come if one points to the sky during a thunderstorm—possibly it may attract the lightning. As elsewhere it is bad luck to turn mattresses, move house or start a new job—it never will be finished—on a Friday. It is also unlucky to correct a statement made in which words have been inadvertently mixed up (e.g. a spoonerism), to change clothes put on inside out, or to pick up one's fallen glove oneself.

Deliberate attempts to tell the future are still sometimes made. One is with the Bible and key. To learn the initials of one's future sweetheart's name, a large key is inserted in a Bible at the 7th Chapter of the song of Solomon, at right angles to the text. The Bible is then closed and tied tightly, leaving the bow of the key exposed. The first finger of each

hand is then placed under the bow of the key and the Bible lifted so that its weight is taken on the two fingers. The following words are then said after each letter of the alphabet. "A. is my beloved and my beloved is mine, he dwelleth among the lilies, turn Bible turn." The letter reached when the Bible turns on the balancing fingers indicates the initial letter of the sweetheart's Christian name. The whole process is then repeated to determine the initial of the surname.

In St. Neots churchyard, south of the tower is a monument consisting of a monolith on a base of three steps. It once had a low surrounding iron fence with four corner posts, and is a memorial to the Darnell family, dated 1842. Fifty years ago children believed that if they formed a ring and danced three times round the monument after dark, touching the corner posts as they passed, "something" would appear, possibly a ghost or a fairy.

#### WITCHCRAFT.

Accounts of witchcraft in Huntingdonshire follow familiar lines and there is little doubt that the public believed in the existence and power of witches long after this particular form of devil worship had ceased to be practised in England. It is interesting that in the surviving Assize Rolls of the 17th century examined by me I found no cases of witchcraft, whereas in similar rolls for Cambridgeshire a number occurred.

The cases of the Warboys and Hartford witches can be read in detail in Saunder's "Legends and Traditions of Huntingdonshire"—John Samuel (or Samwell) together with his wife and daughter were condemned to death at Huntingdon Assizes in 1593 and executed for bewitching the children of Mr. Thockmorton and others at Warboys. It is interesting to note that in the evidence for the prosecution it was stated that part of the older woman's hair had been cut off and burnt to counteract her influence and that she is said to have had nine familiars, of which seven were called Pluck, Hardname, Catch, three Smacs (cousins) and Blew. Out of the confiscated goods of the accused Sir Henry Cromwell gave £40 to Queen's College, Cambridge, for a sermon to be preached every Lady Day against Witchcraft in All Saints' Church, Huntingdon. This was continued regularly for over two centuries.

A hundred years later it was the sadistic persecutors of a supposed witch who suffered at the hands of the law. About 1815 a reputed witch called Nanny Izzard lived at Great Paxton, and a long account of her case is given by Saunders, and also in the St. Neot's Almanack of 1903. The Women's Institute Competition of 1935 produced from Great Paxton

a fresh crop of stories about Nanny Izzard, handed down to the present time. They are interesting as showing the firm belief of the villagers in the witch, in spite of the strenuous efforts of the Vicar and the prison sentences meted out to a number of her tormentors. The hitherto unpublished stories are as follows:—

Mr. Papworth, landlord of the Bell, also kept a village shop, and because of a refusal to give her goods on credit, Nanny is said to have "witched" Mrs. Papworth one afternoon while she was entertaining a friend to tea. Mrs. Papworth had some sort of a fit, and even danced on the tea table among the cups. The guest, Mrs. Hook, then seized the witch and between them they held her down on the table and scratched her with a pin until blood was drawn (to break the spell). For this assault the two women were sentenced to a month's imprisonment each.

Nanny was also in the habit of getting her butter without payment and if this was refused would put her hand in the churn and it would then refuse to turn. The farmer, Mr. Bidwell, cured her of this trick by putting a red hot poker in the churn.

The driver of a wagon load of hay going over Paxton Hill had his load overturned because he refused her a lift up the hill.

She knew intuitively when the Vicar, the Rev. Isaac Nicholson, was going to have a bird for dinner, and would appear at the door to beg the gizzards, these were to feed her "familiar" or demons!

In the Vicar's own account he tells of his strong efforts both in and out of the pulpit to persuade the villagers of their errors and admits that eleven out of every twelve persons refused to believe him, and strongly condemned his attempts at protection. It is interesting to learn from him that Thomas Brown, father of one of the supposedly bewitched girls, attempted to discover the witch and break the spell by filling a bottle with a particular kind of liquid, stuffing the cork with pins both top and bottom, and setting it carefully in an oven in a moderate heat. He believed that a variety of forms would then appear before his eyes including one he would recognize as the witch. The charm did not succeed. At one time Nanny Izzard came to the Vicar and begged him to weigh her against the Bible to prove her innocence.

Nanny Izzard was finally driven out of Great Paxton and ended her days at St. Neots. Even in recent years, Eynesbury children were told that if they went up to Potton corner (the last corner in Eynesbury parish on the Gamlingay road) at midnight, they would see Nanny Izzard riding on a broomstick.

In Vol. IV., page 125 of these Transactions, Mrs. Yeatherd describes the discovery in 1914, of a Bellarmine jug buried below the hearth of an old cottage at Wennington. The jug was full of clay stuck with pins. There is little doubt that some former occupant of the cottage had tried to injure an enemy by modelling his or her figure in clay, sticking in pins to cause aches and pains on corresponding parts of the victim's body. Probably some intimate parts of the enemy, such as hair or nail clippings, were incorporated in the clay figure. The jug was carefully hidden to prevent an outsider finding it and breaking the spell.

#### GHOSTS AND SPIRITS.

In my experience this county has few ghosts, and as far as I know, no spirits or fairies. Haunted houses or localities are not numerous. It is difficult now to determine what foundation there is for the ghost stories in Chamber's "Huntingdonshire Legends." The ghost of Queen Catherine is vouched for by all those who have lived in Kimbolton Castle, while at Tidley Cross, Colne, a headless horseman is said to ride by at midnight. It may be said that the fear of being in or near churchyards after dark, is now practically dead.

#### GREAT GRANSDEN MILL.

I have a newspaper cutting (undated but probably about 1920) of an interview with Richard Webb of Shefford, Bedford, grandson of William Webb, who was the last miller of Great Gransden windmill, and died about 1890. His story, in short is as follows:—

A ne'er-do-well brother of Wm. Webb's wife came to live at the mill house, and eventually died there. In sorting out his belongings, Mrs. Webb came across his "Infidel's Bible." She removed this with a pair of tongs with the intention of burning it, but her husband, interposed, saying he would sell the book when next in town. In spite of his wife's protests and prognostications of bad luck, he took the book and hid it in the mill and forgot all about it. The mill then suddenly stopped working, and for three years not a grain of corn was ground in spite of all the efforts of skilled millwrights, who could discover no defect. Webb had to get rid of all his men, and became almost bankrupt.

At this juncture, Richard Webb the narrator, came to live with his grandparents and heard from his grandmother of the Infidel's Bible. In the course of his exploration of the mill he chanced to find the book and bore it in triumph to the house. His grandmother quickly threw the book on the fire. At once the sails began to turn, slowly at first, but with increasing speed as the book was reduced to ashes.

## FOLK MEDICINE.

Were the necessary time given to research, this subject could no doubt be extended to an article on its own. Before the days of the telephone, the motor car, the district nurse, and the Health Insurance, country people relied mainly on their own home-made remedies for all but the more serious cases of illness or injury. In a few cases these home-made medicines were scientifically effective, but in many others they were based on pure superstition, and their effectiveness can only be attributed to faith healing.

For some unexplained reason, warts have always attracted supernatural methods of healing, and plenty of living people are willing to swear, by personal experience, of their effectiveness. In the early part of the century, Reuben Peach of Farcet was widely known as a successful wart charmer, and sufferers came from all over the north of the county to be treated by him. He was interviewed by a reporter of the Peterborough Advertiser, but refused to reveal his methods. His patients were strictly admonished to keep his instructions to them secret, and threatened that their warts would return if they revealed them. In St. Neots I have been told several times of the following cure. Steal a piece of meat, without being detected, and after rubbing it in on the warts, bury it secretly, telling no one. As the meat decays the warts will disappear. A similar method is to rub a black slug on the warts and then impale it on a thorn bush. As the slug dies, the warts die also. In the Peterborough district it was believed that warts would go if a shepherd counted them. A more direct method was to rub the warts with either the juice of a Lesser Celandine, the inside of a windsor bean pod, or a raw potato.

A cure for fits was revealed in the Ramsey Police Court in 1861. Miss Stacey of Middlemoor said in evidence that she had been instructed to get nine sixpences from nine married men. These were to be given of the men's own free will and with them she was to have a ring made, the wearing of which would cure her fits.

Ague and rheumatism were once very common in the fens. For the former large quantities of opium pills were sold by chemists. The following cure is recorded by Cuthbert Bede (N. & Q. Vol. IX., 1st S., 1854). Cut a few hairs from the cross marked on a donkey's shoulders, and enclose these in a small bag and wear on the breast next the skin. For a cure to result, the matter must be kept secret. Another method was to swallow a spider in a pill of dough. In Fenland Notes & Queries (part 31, 1896), is given a Fenland charm against ague. This was worn round the neck and consisted of a piece of paper on which was written in

Hebrew characters the word "ABRACADABRA" in the form of a triangle standing on its apex. It was dated 1815.

For rheumatism the carrying of various things in the pocket that suggest dryness are still recommended. These include a dried toad in a box, a bag of brimstone, or a dried potato. From Bluntisham comes the belief in a red ribbon tied round the leg.

Against cramp, the dried feet of moles or hedgehogs were a prevention if carried in the pocket.

Nose bleeding was treated by cobwebs put in the nostrils, or dropping the door key, or a "blood-agate" stone, down the back next the skin.

Sore throats are still being treated by tying a dirty stocking (that has been worn at least a week) round the neck at night, and colds on the chest by applying a sheet of brown paper liberally smeared with a tallow caudle. A shop in Earith still sells tallow candles for this sole purpose.

Mouse flesh plays an important part in folk medicine. At St. Neots recently, a child was cured of bed-wetting by being given a small pudding, made in a cup, containing beef and the flesh of a mouse. I have also been recommended at St. Neots, to cook and eat a mouse for colds on the chest.

Quite recently I was asked by the mother of a child that had been mildly bitten by their pet dog, if I thought it necessary to destroy the dog. She was reluctant to do this, but neighbours had told her that the wound would not heal while the dog lived.

Smallpox was a great scourge before the discovery of vaccination. From Brampton comes the belief (N. & Q. Vol. XI., 2nd S., 1861) that if the patient's bedroom window was left open at night, gnats would enter and fly away laden with germs, and so help a cure. Guinea pigs were kept by many people in the belief that they were more prone to the disease, and would thus save their keepers.

For a sty on the eye, it is recommended at St. Neots, that a wedding ring be rubbed on it to effect a cure.

Cuthbert Bede records that in a case of typhus fever, the skirt of a sheep was applied to the patient's feet for 7 hours, as it was believed this would draw the fever from his head. (N. & Q. Vol. X., 3rd S., 1866).

The growth of hair on the head is said at St. Neots, to be stimulated by rubbing the head with a raw onion.

#### POPULAR BELIEFS CONCERNING NATURAL PHENOMENA.

##### *The Moon.*

Belief in the effect of the moon on weather, the sowing and progress of crops, the killing of pigs, and on human life is still widespread.

Hard prolonged frost is not considered likely unless the moon be full, farmers still wait for a waxing moon to sow their crops, pigs until recently were only killed towards the full of the moon. A black or moonless Christmas is said to foretell a good harvest, and a bad year for beans.

#### *Thunder.*

Quite a number of people suffer physically, usually in their digestive organs, during thunderstorms. At Ramsey Mereside, it is considered dangerous to point to the sky for fear of attracting lightning. Elder bushes growing near a house are believed to protect it from lightning.

#### *Plants.*

Few people will transplant parsley for fear of bad luck. Elder bushes are often saved for the reason given above. May flowers are seldom brought into a house for fear of bad luck. Mandrake is regarded with a certain amount of awe, but few know why; see Genesis xxx, 14 *et seq.* Horsekeepers like to give the roots to their horses as a tonic. At St. Neots it is considered lucky to have houseleeks growing on a house roof, as they keep illness away. It is also lucky to keep the Christmas bunch of mistletoe as long as possible in the house according to the couplet:—

“Mistletoe dead  
Never want bread.”

#### *Trees.*

The hawthorn had some undoubted sacred significance. It is difficult to define this, but its prominent place in the May Day festival may furnish a clue. Many isolated thorn bushes had names, and must have survived to a great age through popular superstition against cutting them down. Many probably marked boundaries, and those growing on the balks of the pre-inclosure fields often gave their name to the furlong on which they stood.

A famous thorn called Beggar's Bush or King's Bush, grew beside the Ermine Street, about a mile south of Godmanchester. King James 1st while on progress to Huntingdon. is said to have reproved Chancellor Bacon for his extravagance by telling him, as he approached this spot, that he would soon come to Beggar's Bush. This was a simile for bankruptcy of which I am unable to explain the origin.

In an old note book from Great Gransden, the writer speculates, in the year 1821, as to the origin of a number of named hawthorn bushes running in a line east and west across the middle of the parish. They were:—“Money Bushes” in the bottom of Moor Field west of the Eltisleigh Potton road (see Cambs. and Hunts. Arch. Soc. Trans., Vol.

V. p. 392); "Ramscothe Bush," two hawthorns on top of the hill east of the above road on what is called Ramscoth Way; "Hobland Bush," a single thorn on the same ridge further east; The Bushes at Alley-pit head. A very old thorn, possibly one of the above, still survives on the south side of the Gransden to Caxton road, near the "New Diggings" public house.

In Bluntisham pre-inclosure fields Tillage Bush and Wheeley Bush gave their name to furlongs. I have noted the following on old maps:—Bartle Bush, Hamerton, 1808; Shepherds Bush Furlong, Stibbington, (about 1700); Shadow Bush Meadow, Great Staughton, 1807.

### ANIMALS

Among domestic animals the donkey is believed to possess magic qualities, particularly when it is dead. In 1937 a dead donkey was brought to a horse slaughterer's yard at St. Neots. The employees were very excited and all jumped three times over the carcass for luck. They declared they would be sure to win something in the Football Pool that week.

The belief in the hare as an animal of ill omen has now died out. There is however an old rhyme:—

"If a hare in hasty flight  
Should scamper through the Ramsey Whyte,  
Be sure before three days are gone  
A fire will rage in Ramsey town"

A similar rhyme is recorded of Peterborough Minster Close. The robin is still regarded by some as a dangerous bird. It is bad luck to have one enter a room or fly against a window, and people will drive it away if it comes too near the house in search of crumbs. As a boy, at Bluntisham, I was told by village boys that it is bad luck to rob a robin's nest, and they said of one of their number, who had broken an arm through falling from a harvest cart, that it was a judgment for taking robins' eggs.

A pigeon or any large bird settling on a house is considered a presage of death.

Rooks are said to nest only where the owner is prosperous, and the more young rooks he shoots, the better will the rookery thrive.

Some people consider stuffed birds bring bad luck to the house. This may only refer to certain kinds of birds. I have been told a long tale of deaths and financial losses that overtook a succession of owners of a stuffed hawk, even the auctioneer who finally sold it, dropped dead in the sale-room.

At St. Neots it is lucky if the first lamb that you see in the New Year is looking at you, and not away from you.

The saying that "A May kitten makes a dirty cat" (N. & Q. Vol. VIII., 3rd S., 1865) contains the belief that all May born kittens should be drowned.

#### GRAVEL.

Old gravel diggers firmly believe that gravel grows in the ground. They tell of land dug out by their grandfathers which they have opened and found full of gravel again. No reasoning shakes their belief.

#### WELLS AND SPRINGS.

A number of springs in the county were once noted for their medicinal cures, and they include those at Somersham Heath, Huntingdon, and Hail Weston. I can find no remembered or recorded folk-lore about these.

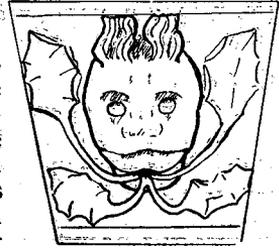
At Holywell there is a very ancient well, which gave its name to the village and probably caused the original church to be built just above it. Roman pottery can be found all round it. It was a common practice for early Christian missionaries to establish their churches on sites where their converts had previously practised worship or ceremonial. The well in Holywell churchyard had a modern structure built round it during the last century. There does not appear to be any local custom of dropping coins or pins in the well. I cleared out the basin in 1936, and only found one penny dated 1905. About 1933 the late Mrs. Yeatherd saw a woman sitting with her feet in the well to cure a foot complaint. In 1935 I was told in Holywell that people often came to bathe for such complaints as sore eyes. In the previous year a boy with a sore on his forehead that would not heal, came and bathed it with water from this well, and it at once healed up.

#### NON-ECCLESIASTICAL OBJECTS CONNECTED WITH CHURCHES.

The study of non-ecclesiastical symbols and figures in church carving, is a recent one, and there is room for a great deal more research before we shall understand the meaning of all the grotesques that are so common in our churches. One motif, of which we do know at least what it is meant to represent, is the "green man" or "jack-in-the-green." This usually is represented by a man's head with sprays of foliage issuing from his mouth, and often from his eyes, ears, and nostrils as well. He is the tree spirit associated with the May Day festival and Oak Apple Day, and probably may be identified with such popular heroes as Robin Hood and later Charles in the Oak. Good examples of the "green man" can be seen on a pew end in Glatton Church (see Royal Commission on Historical Monuments,

Huntingdonshire, plates 9 and 154); Little Stukeley Church roof, and Bluntisham Church font.

The second class of carvings which have been studied is of more obscure origin. The type specimen is usually a crudely carved female figure with exaggerated sexual features, called by anthropologists a Sheila-na-gig. A less common type is a carved scene of a leud or suggestive nature. These remarkable carvings are now usually found



BLUNTISHAM.

at a high elevation on the outside of a church where they are difficult to see. It has been suggested that they may have once played a part in ensuring fertility to marriages solemnised in the church. A good example of the first type occurs in the outside east wall at Woolley Church, where it has been recently re-set from a more obscure position near the ridge. Possible examples of the second type occur high up on the west side of Kimbolton Church tower and on the west side of Buckden Church porch.

#### MISCELLANEOUS.

##### RUSH BEARING.

At Old Weston a small close of one rood belongs by custom (of which the origin is unknown) to the Parish Clerk. His obligation is to strew the parish church with hay from the close on the village Feast Sunday, which is the first Sunday after St. Swithin's day.

##### BOROUGH ENGLISH.

Extensive research would be necessary to determine in how many Huntingdonshire Manors "Borough English" was the custom, but it certainly was in some. Godmanchester is one well-known example, another is Bluntisham. It has been suggested that this custom had its origin under the practice of "Droits de Seigneur," but, if this were the case, one would expect to find the second son, and not the youngest, the heir. It is interesting to note that Bluntisham manor has, since the Conquest, belonged successively to the Abbot, the Prior, and the Dean and Chapter of Ely.

# AN IRON AGE AND ROMAN SITE AT HOUGHTON.

BY J. R. GARROOD, M.D.

This site is at the pumping station of the Huntingdon Rural District Council at Houghton. In 1936, when the settling tank was being dug, a quantity of pottery was found and the wall of the settling tank showed on the S.E. face a section of a ditch 7 ft. wide and 2 ft. 6 ins. deep; the centre is 8 ft. from the N.E. end of the tank. The ditch was filled with black earth, and I found pottery in it including two pieces of Iron Age type at 2 ft. 3 ins.

The field in which the station is situated is in the flood plain of the Ouse and the soil beneath the humus is a dirty gravel.

I have excavated to the S.E. and N.W. of the tank for short distances; the ditch is V section and shallows to the S.E., but deeper on the N.W., the maximum being 4 ft.

In 1940 an extension was made at the N.E. end of the pumping house, and from the foundation trenches came some more pottery.

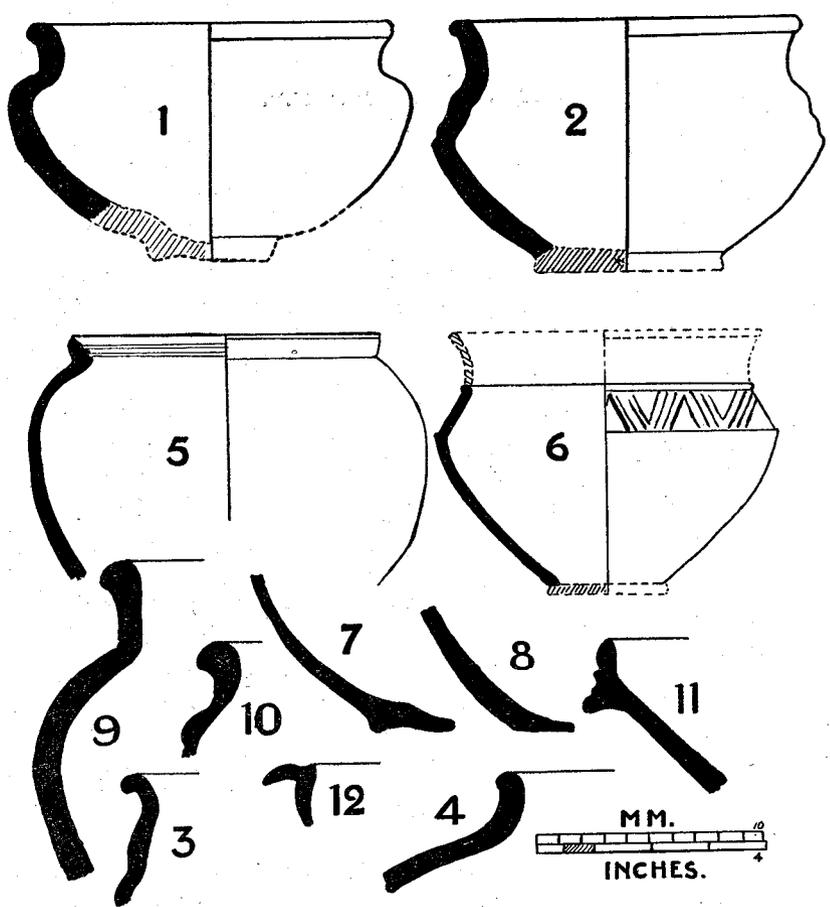
I have called the tank Site 1; the S.E. trench, Site 2; the N.W. trench, Site 3; and the extension, Site 4.

## POTTERY.

1. A restoration based on a fragment which gives a nearly complete section. The bowl is high-shouldered with outbent rim. Diameter 6.2 ins. at the rim, 7 ins. at the shoulder, approximate height 4.2 ins. Grey paste with smooth brown exterior; wheel made. Iron Age C. From Site 1.

2. Another restoration, also nearly a complete section. This is a carinated vessel with moulded, nearly straight rim; the neck slopes slightly outwards; there are two convolutions on the shoulder and a smooth body. Diameter at rim 6.2 ins., at shoulder 6.8 ins., height 4.5 ins. Dark grey paste, smooth and nearly black outside; wheel made; rather poor workmanship. Iron Age C. From Site 1.

3. Portion of rim and neck having two shallow grooves with two convolutions below. Grey paste, fairly smooth buff surface. The specimen appears to be similar to No. VII. from Wheathampstead Oppidum (Verulamium) Report, 1936, Pl. XLIX. From Site 2.



IRON AGE AND ROMAN POTTERY FROM HOUGHTON.

4. Portion of rim and shoulder of a hand made vessel with plain outbent rim showing slight beading, a short neck and high shoulder. Equivalent diameter at rim 6 ins. Coarse grey paste with smooth black rather soapy surface on the outside and rough within; there are a few thin shallow grooves or scratches round the neck. Iron Age or perhaps more probably Saxon. From Site 4.

5. Part of a short-necked high-shouldered olla with straight outbent rim, having two grooves on the inside. Diameter 5.5 to 6 ins. From a depth of 4 ft. Site 3. First century, A.D.

6. Part of a bi-conical vessel with the rim missing; the shoulder is bounded above by a small cordon and below by a set off; it is ornamented with a multiple chevron pattern. The form of this pattern is similar to many specimens from All Cannings (Iron Age A) but there the lines are more deeply incised and often filled with white inlay. Of hard buff paste with smooth black coating. From a depth of 4 ft. Site 3. First century, A.D.

7. Part of a base and side. The foot is hollow but sags down at the centre. Grey paste, brown smooth surface. From Site 1. Iron age C.

8. Part of a plain base. Smooth surface, blackened by fire, rough inside. From 1 ft. 9 ins. and 2 ft. 2 ins. Site 2. Iron Age C.

9. Part of a large store jar. Straight neck and thickened rim; a groove on the shoulder, and horizontal markings, not amounting to rilling, on the body. Equivalent diameter at rim 16 ins. Grey paste, red sandy surface. From a depth of 1 ft. 4 ins. Site 4. Second or third century.

10. Similar rim and shoulder, from the same Site. Diameter of rim 12 ins.

11. Part of a reeded, flanged rim of a mortarium; buff paste and surface with black particles embedded in the side. 10 ins. diameter. From Site 1. Third to fourth Century.

12. A piece of the rim of a flanged bowl with a very small rim. About 7 ins. diameter. Light red paste and surface, hard and sandy. From Site 3, depth 3 ft. 5 ins. This looks like a derivative of the Samian form D, 36, but without the ivy leaf decoration, and may be third century.

Besides the pieces illustrated there are a number of fragments of Iron Age C pottery; very little is gritted. A Castor rim comes from Site 2, 9 ins. from the surface. On Site 1 a stone naturally shaped like a spoon was found—it may have been used as such; the handle part was hollow. Bones were found in moderate amount, doubtless kitchen refuse. No metal objects were found as far as I know.

CONCLUSION.

A habitation site lasting at least three hundred years. Sites Nos. 1, 2 and 3 are part of one of the ditches beloved by the Ancient Britons and filled with their disjecta. Site 4 is probably rather later but still mainly within the Roman period.

Our member Mr. C. M. Coote has published his finds at a neighbouring Site. (Trans. Cambs. and Hunts. Arch. Soc. V., 248-250). He found material of the Bronze, Iron and Roman periods, so it is evident that this area at the foot of Houghton Hill has been inhabited for a very long time.

I am indebted to the Huntingdon Rural District Council for reserving the archæological finds and for the opportunity to dig, and to the workmen for saving the pottery.

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REPORT OF THE COUNCIL, FOR THE SESSION

1941-42.

The Council begs to report that there is a membership of 59. Two new members have been elected, and one lost by death; this was Mrs. Fenwick, of Stukeley Hall, who took a general interest in archæology and was a member for a number of years.

No part of the Transactions has been issued this year; Part IV. of Vol. VI. being issued in 1941, and Part V. is not yet ready. Publication, though difficult, is thought to be worth while, in the interest of archæology and of the members, and it will be continued as long as possible.

No excursions have been held.

The Council recommends the election of Mr. C. F. Tebbutt and Dr. Garrood as Delegates to the Congress of Archæological Societies.

Mr. Tebbutt continues the Photographic record.

There is a vacancy on the Council to which it recommends that Mr. C. Newman, the County Librarian, be appointed.

The following members of the Council retire by rotation, Mrs. Priestley, Mr. Saltmarsh and Mr. Hargreaves, and, being eligible the Council recommends their re-election.

The Council thanks the Officers, and all who have helped the Society, during the past year.



