

◆ The unregarded Sussex of J M Neale

By M. J. Leppard

The Revd John Mason Neale (1818–66) is best known today for his hymns and carols. In Sussex his wardenship of Sackville College, East Grinstead, and his foundation there of the Sisterhood of Saint Margaret have not been forgotten. In his time, however, he was also known, nationally and beyond, for his involvement, practically and in his writings, in almost every field of ecclesiastical life and learning. His interest in Sussex was only occasionally the subject of his published work, but evidence for it and for his identification with the county frequently shows through in passing references across the whole range of his printed work, in his letters and in some surviving documents. In many instances he was directing attention to subjects to which little regard had been given before: and what he accomplished in that respect has been disregarded on account of the scope and scale of his other achievements. This article is not an account or assessment of his life and work in Sussex but a presentation and discussion of what he saw, heard and appreciated in the county in his writings. Though Neale is now best known as a versifier of variable literary merit, direct quotations will illustrate his mastery of English prose. My aim throughout is to show that he still deserves recognition by historians and lovers of Sussex, worthy to stand with the rather later and more systematic writers celebrated in such recent work of the late Peter Brandon as his study of ‘John Halsham’ in these Collections.¹

Only the briefest outline of Neale’s life and career need be given here; several accounts have been published over the years, of which the most recent and most comprehensive was produced by Michael Chandler in 1995.² The earliest, serialised in the *St Margaret’s magazine* (East Grinstead) from 1887 to 1895, is a compilation, by one of the nuns professed in Neale’s time, of extensive quotations from published and unpublished documents and personal memories, together with contributions from two of his daughters. Some bound volumes of the relevant pages were published in 1895 as *John Mason Neale, a memoir*, edited anonymously by Sister Miriam. It has been the foundation of all subsequent work.

John Mason Neale was born in London on 24 January 1818 in an Evangelical Anglican family with distinguished professional forebears on both sides. He was educated privately at Shepperton, then in schools at Blackheath, Sherborne and Farnham, before entering Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1836. There his attraction to the prevailing antiquarianism of the time, increasingly being permeated by Oxford Tractarianism, led him to found, with fellow-undergraduates, a society to study ecclesiastical architecture, restore churches and build new ones. In 1841 he was made a deacon and served briefly as chaplain of Downing College. On being priested the next year he was presented to the rectory of Crawley

in Sussex, by Francis Scawen Blunt of Crabbet Park in Worth.³ Neale took possession and began work energetically, but his health broke down before he could be instituted. He married Sarah Webster soon after leaving. His next salaried post, at £28 a year, came in 1846: resident Warden of the Jacobean almshouse, Sackville College, in East Grinstead (Fig. 1), where he stayed until his death on 6 August 1866. The vacancy had been ‘mentioned accidentally’, in the sense of incidentally, by Anderdon the curate of Reigate on 5 January, and on 17 January a letter inviting him to apply arrived from the Hon. and Revd Reginald Windsor Sackville-West, second son of the hereditary patron of the College, Earl de la Warr.⁴ West, the Rector of Withyham, the parish of the ancestral seat, had been Manning’s curate in his Anglican days, was ecclesiologically-minded, and must, at least, have known of Neale’s writings. During his time at the College, from 26 May 1846, J. M. Neale restored the buildings, improved the lot of the inmates, was inhibited from clerical functions by the bishop of Chichester, fell out with the vicar and the assistant wardens, founded one of the first sisterhoods in the Church of England, and engaged in local and national controversies. Throughout his adult life he was constantly travelling (including self-financed study tours on the continent to consolidate the scholarly soundness of his published work), researching,



Sackville College East Grinstead

H. Connold
East Grinstead

Fig. 1. North-western corner of the quadrangle at Sackville College, including two features from Neale's restoration: the well-house designed by William Butterfield and the belfry topped by a leopard, one of the supporters of the Sackville coat of arms visible over the doorway. Photograph by Harold Connold, in business in East Grinstead 1926–59, issued by him as no.24 in his postcard series.

writing, preaching and lecturing, all facilitated by constantly expanding railway networks. At the same time he was a faithful priest and pastor and a real family man, devoted to his wife and five children (Fig. 2).

The principal fields in which Neale was and remains significant in the wider world were explored by A. G. Lough for his Ph.D. thesis and formed the basis of his book, *The influence of John Mason Neale*.⁵ He and others have studied particular aspects of Neale's activity in other books and articles. Neale's permanent place in the life of the Church of England

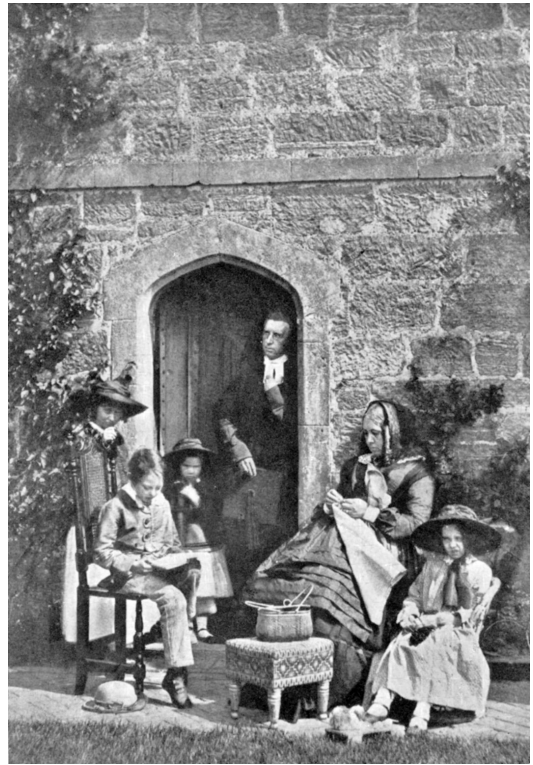


Fig. 2. J. M. Neale and his family at Sackville College in 1855, photograph probably taken by Joseph Cundall.

was honoured on his centenary by an enhanced memorial in East Grinstead churchyard, dedicated by the archbishop of Canterbury at the end of a special service in July 1966. The Sussex aspect of the centenary was marked by Stanley Godman of Brighton in contributions to newspapers, carefully researched and thoughtfully written but never followed up.⁶ Neale had already been depicted in stained glass in East Grinstead parish church and in Chichester cathedral. The appropriateness of such commemoration in the mother church of Sussex should be substantiated by the rest of this article.

J. M. Neale was already well acquainted with the county before his appointment to Crawley in 1842. His widowed mother had taken up residence in Brighton some years earlier, and from its start in 1839 he and the other members of the Cambridge Camden Society (as they initially named it) had been touring the country 'taking' churches, i.e. recording every feature on a detailed questionnaire. It is an indication of the confidence Neale and his

colleagues both inspired and felt that in May 1839, aged 21, he was put in charge of the restoration of New Shoreham church by its appropriators, Magdalen College, Oxford, his only such role in the county. His account of it appeared in the *Transactions* of the C.C.S., renamed in 1841 *The Ecclesiologist*, the first number of which included an update.⁷ As illustrations of Neale's first-hand knowledge of Sussex, in April that year he visited the churches at Patching, Clapham and Findon and admired the landscape from Cissbury Hill, and in August he undertook the duties at Hove parish church, St Andrew's.⁸ Much of what was published about Sussex churches in the *Ecclesiologist* over the years was reprinted and discussed, with detailed background information on the society, in the *Sussex Archaeological Collections* from 1943 to 1949.⁹ Although most contributions were anonymous, some must have come from Neale. All proclaim unequivocally the principles, prejudices and interventions he and his supporters espoused and executed, highlighting specific unregarded shortcomings or instances of good practice in order to raise standards nationwide. Without them we should be much less well-informed about the state and appearance of many of our churches before 'restoration' and less well able to interpret what was altered or created in the process. Since all these texts are readily available in print it would be superfluous to quote them here or cite further Sussex examples.

Neale's interest in the history of the churches studied was limited to the development and use or abuse of their structure and fittings. His only serious and sustained research into a local history topic concerned Sackville College, necessitated by the controversies and litigation over its status, particularly that of its chapel, the interpretation and implementation of its statutes, and Neale's eligibility to be its warden and to officiate as its chaplain. The story of these long, complex and bitter disputes, and the violence that they sometimes engendered, is recounted in the books about Neale and in accounts of the College.¹⁰ Neale's was the first attempt to assemble and collate its archives and to put in writing contemporary testimonies to how things had been before his arrival in May 1846, primarily for use in court. Understandably he turned his findings to account, publishing them in 1853 in a booklet, *A history of Sackville College*.¹¹ The whereabouts of only five copies are known: in the College itself, the British Library, the

Bodleian Library, Brighton Public Library and with the Charity Commissioners. A bound volume of pamphlets in East Grinstead parish church which contained a copy has disappeared, but a free version is now on the internet at Google Books.

Neale's other forays into local history were incidental to his major projects. Some were journalism, to fund employing a governess for his children,¹² some were fiction, usually designed to make a polemical point or convey a moral message, one was a curious hybrid of fact and fiction.

His journalism included contributions on various subjects, usually anonymous, to the monthly magazine for families the *Penny Post*, probably most often read aloud by one member to the others. An excellent example, for the quality of both research and writing, is the article 'The iron-works of Sussex' in the August 1854 number, typically dealing with a subject which at the time had until recently gone unregarded by historians. In a postscript he refers to the treatment of the subject in volumes 2 and 3 of the *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, saying 'I have borrowed something from it, but I must in justice observe that the greater part of my research had been made before I had the pleasure of reading it.' What Neale wrote on the subject therefore cannot be disregarded, not least because his unsubstantiated assertion that 'noddy' is one of the words for 'the scoria of the iron-ore' is the source of subsequent attempts to explain a minor-place name, Mount Noddy, found in several locations in the Weald, by reference to the iron industry.¹³

The first paragraph is worth quoting in full because it demonstrates Neale's keen eye for landscape, his love of Sussex, and his scrupulous choice of the most exactly appropriate words to express them.¹⁴ The structure of the passage, speedily collapsing into a pedant-defying cascade of images, reflects both the feverish working of Neale's mind and the snapshot glimpses from the train hurtling past.

I know, more or less, the scenery of every county in England; and I must confess that, excepting the Lake district and North Devonshire, I can name none that, on the whole, seems to me equal to Sussex. People who rush along the Brighton Railway and find themselves at the Old Ship, or the Brunswick, an hour and a half after leaving London Bridge have no idea of the lovely

country through which they are whirled. Old picturesque villages, cresting the steep brow of a hill, with quaintly wrought gables, and great mullioned Elizabethan windows, grey walls, with copings that could remember Bosworth or Flodden fields – and were perhaps leant against by the village politicians who were discussing the wonderful news from France in the November of 1415; venerable farms niched in on the southern side of some sunny hill, the wallet oak (to use a Sussex word) – that stands in front of the porch, and affords shelter to the white owl on a November night – the wish below, where the cattle are quietly feeding, the honeysuckles and roses that run up the porch, built by the well-to-do yeoman of James the First's time; wild glens in the forest, where rocks tower up above oaks and ash trees, grey with moss, scarred with storms, and whispered to all day by the young fern – I say, the people who rush along the railways know nothing of this; but you, who read *The Penny Post*, shall hear “all about it”, as the children say; and it will be my own fault if it is not worth the hearing.

Such word-painting was essential at a time when books and magazines carried few drawings and no photographs. Neale's facility even extended to visualising and describing accurately scenery he knew only from books. A daughter recalled how in 1861 the Cambridge scholar and traveller George Williams asked, ‘When were you in Georgia?’ To his response ‘Never’, Williams ‘expressed great surprise, remarking that he thought from the descriptions in [his story] the “Lily of Tiflis” my father must have been out there’.¹⁵ Four years earlier, however, Neale had visited Arles before starting work on one of his children's ‘tales illustrating church history’, ‘for...I can never write a story unless I know the locality.’¹⁶

A further example of Neale's ability to conjure up the Sussex landscape, to set alongside his evocation of the Weald, is the depiction of the South Downs in the first four paragraphs of his novel *Poynings*, published in 1846 (Fig. 3):

I know not whether the reader, who may chance to take up this tale, is acquainted with the Sussex Downs. I do not say whether he has seen them – for that, I suppose, most people, in this day of railway travelling have done – but whether he has spent long summer days in exploring their soft turfy valleys, or

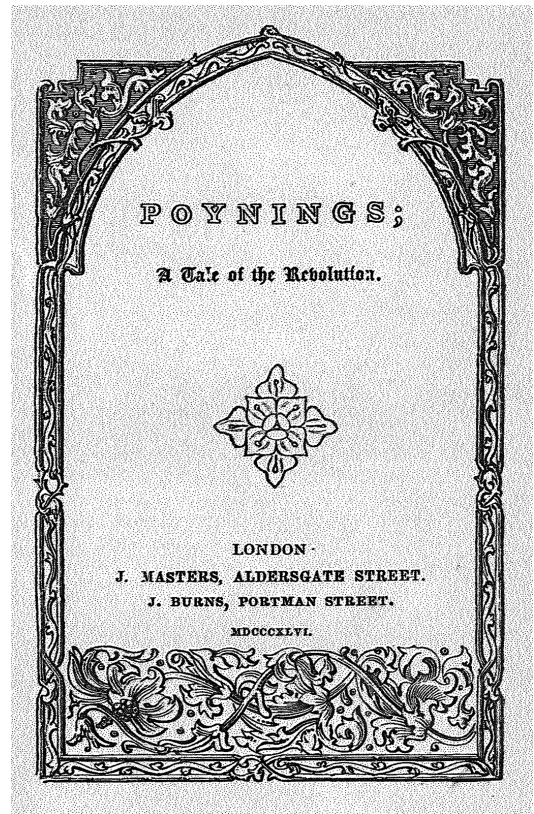


Fig. 3. Title page of Neale's story *Poynings*, 1846.

bold – but, oh, how smooth! – promontories? If not, I must, as others have done before me, begin my tale with a description.

The Sussex Downs are a range of hills which reach from Portsdown to Beachy Head, rising boldly and steeply from the lowland on the north, and dying away gently into the sea on the south. On their northern boundary they are so steep as to present a wall of the finest turf: in many places they are buttressed up by long spurs or tongues, which, shooting out into the quiet country at their feet, seem as if intended to support and to strengthen the whole mass: and here and there round hills, like watch-towers, jut out from the rest, as if they guarded the most important positions in the long series of downs. On the hills themselves there is hardly a tree to be seen: and the few oaks that have contrived to resist the fury of the south-west storms,

bend in the opposite direction, and spread out their long twisted arms to the east, as if imploring protection against the bitter winds with which they have so long battled. Stunted and scarred, and tortured into all manner of odd forms, they are just the trees that make the traveller, on an autumn evening, wrap his cloak more closely around him, and say, while he shrugs up his shoulders and shivers, "This must be a bleak place in winter."

But it is far different with the happy little valleys which lie at the side of the hill-buttresses which I have just mentioned. Here are warm copses of oak and ash; grey cottages, with their roofs of Horsham slate; hedge-rows white in spring with May thorn, glittering in autumn with the berries of the mountain ash; and lovelier than all, the house of GOD, with its low square tower or shapely spire.

Of these valleys, the prettiest is that in which the village of Poynings crouches down at the foot of the Dyke; for so the range of downs immediately above it is called. The church, which is in the form of a cross is as good a specimen of a temple for villagers as you can see far and near.¹⁷

It is worth reflecting on Neale's technique. For all the complicated structure of the third (and final!) sentence of the first example, as if the pen

could hardly keep up with the torrent of images, comprehension does not require re-reading. Only ten words are of more than two syllables, and they are common ones. The participle 'niced' is hardly a common word (the *Oxford English Dictionary's* first record is 1771) but the meaning is clear and the picture just right in this context. Equally right is the poetic conceit of young fern whispering to ancient rocks; as we are being made to look, not just see, so we are being invited to listen, not just hear. The dialect words, one acknowledged as such, complement the precision of the setting with what the traveller might overhear from the country people, undoubtedly there though out of sight. The language of the second passage is equally inventive, with its animal metaphor of the crouching village and the anthropomorphic description of the trees.

The accuracy of Neale's word-picture in *Poynings* of the, unnamed, principal house in Hangleton, 'which stands, though somewhat altered, at this day', and of the drawing that forms its frontispiece (Fig. 4), was queried by C.E. Clayton in 1886 in view of the 'not now existing features' shown.¹⁸ They certainly bear little resemblance to the late-18th century view of 'Hangleton Place' reproduced in *Sussex Views from the Burrell collections*,¹⁹ and none at all in their representation of the highly distinctive chimneys.²⁰ In this case Neale, followed by the

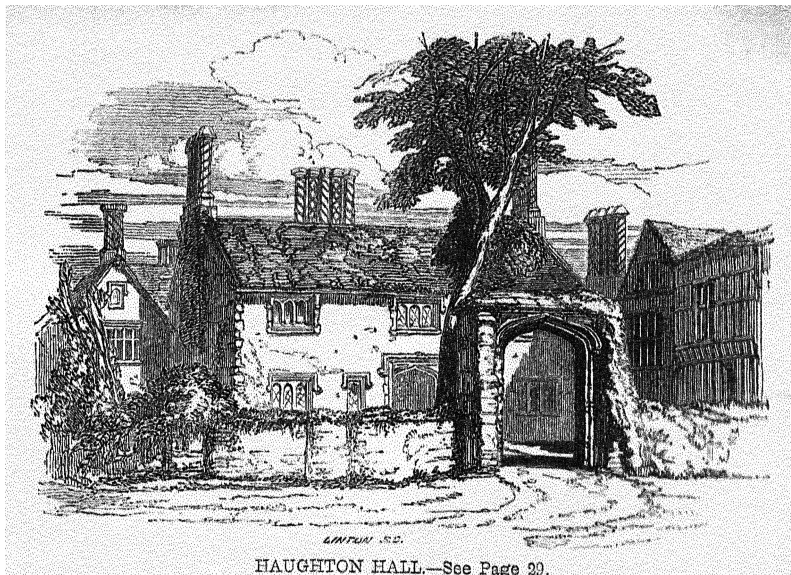


Fig. 4. Frontispiece, *Poynings*.

artist, must be using novelist's licence to imagine plausible settings, just as his local dramatis personae are fictional creations foregrounding real national figures at a specific moment in our history, the 'glorious revolution' of 1688. It is typical of Neale, as a responsible historian, to preface the work with a 'Notice. The following tale will be found to depart from history in only three particulars', which he then itemises. It is an exciting story, whose serious point is to show why opposition to William III and acceptance of Queen Victoria are equally justifiable: the continuing exclusion of the Stuarts can only be the will of God. This 222-page pocket-sized book, volume 17 of the publishers' 'Juvenile Englishman's Library', also expounds in a stilted dialogue the deficiencies of Protestantism. Making his characters speak realistically was not one of Neale's strong points, and it is understandable why Clayton saw it, possibly dismissively, as 'a little Catholic novelette'.

If he ever saw it, Neale might have welcomed that characterisation, but his name never appears in the membership lists in the Sussex Archaeological Society's *Collections*, nor was he even (it seems) familiar with them. Had he been, he would have wanted to rewrite part of 'The Oak of Luxfords Lane', the fourth of ten stories for children, two for each of the first five Sundays in Lent, 'a Sussex tradition of the Great Tempest of 1703; but put in a locality with which I am familiar.'²¹ That locality is East Grinstead, with the story played out in Sackville College and Luxfords Lane, a private road off the A22 one mile out of the town and leading down to two farms. The latter was scarcely less familiar than the College: Neale's daughter, Mary Sackville, recalled Luxford Rocks as a favourite destination for family picnics; in 1854, writing home from Porto, Neale enabled his 8-year-old son Cornelius Vincent to visualise that 'great city, all built up and down hill...steeper than Luxford's Lane';²³ and in 1859 he helped the aged collegians picture the biblical garden of Joseph of Arimathea likewise: 'in all its spring beauty, a garden full of rocks, – something like the Luxford rocks here'.²⁴ Non-local readers of the 'Oak', however, needed a description, and got a typically lyrical vision of its moods:

A lovely lane, indeed, in early spring; when children go out to look for the first primrose, and bring home wonderful tales that the alder is really out, that a lark really sang, that the daisies are on the sunny bank, that there is one branch of blackthorn in blossom, and

carry back one half-opened primrose-bud as a trophy over winter. Lovelier it is on the May night when the nightingale is there.... But in that fearful night [of the storm], scarcely less lovely it seemed to the way-worn man as, plunging between its walls of rock, he bent his way down into the valley. The trees and bushes that skirted the steep summits of the lane side, roared, and whistled, and groaned; but into the river-like bed of the road the wind only penetrated when it shifted a little.

In the story John Lawrence is back in his cottage on the lane after work, together with his wife, as the wind gets up and the rains begin, when a messenger arrives from Sackville College to say that John's father is dying and wants to see him. John and his wife set off, and arrive in time to watch by the old man's bed until 'at the turn of the night the soul went forth'. Then, 'when the tempest was nearly at his height', John struggles painfully back, 'for I cannot leave my master's property in this lonely place by itself.' When he is about half-way down the lane an oak is torn up and dashed into the road, trapping him without hurting him but demolishing his cottage. Ever after he recounted the story to his children, to impress on them the rightness of the commandment 'Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the LORD thy GOD giveth thee.'

Quite rightly Neale also includes the Warden of the College, whom he knew from the records to have been named Thomas Winterbottom. He is presented as 'a good-natured man', addressed by the collegians as he addressed them, 'Master Winterbottom', the title of respect for a working man used in Neale's time both in the college and more widely. He also says no priest was there, in that 'mournful time in the history of the Church of England; when Priests were lukewarm, and people were careless' (a common partisan generalisation) 'and the dying man was left to die as he might.' If only Neale could have referred to the first volume of the *Sussex Archaeological Collections* he would have seen a transcription of an agreement with the rector of Horsted Keynes to pay Thomas Winterbottom £10 a year for reading divine service and all the other duties of the parish.²⁴ Old Lawrence could then have died with all the spiritual comfort that Neale gave the inmates of his day.

One other Sussex story deserves attention, *Gill's Lap*, first published in the *Penny Post* in 1858²⁵ and

set on and around Ashdown Forest, with accurate treatment of the topography, for the plot turns on distances and the time required to traverse them by horse-drawn vehicle and on foot. Thus, for example (page 30)

And now they were ascending the steep hill above Coleman's Hatch [Shepherd's Hill]: I can bear witness to it myself; both when the whole backbone of the Downs was white with snow, and when the heath was just beginning to deck the soft breast of the chain of hills with a purple that can only be rivalled by the most glorious of autumn sunsets.

They reached the summit. Straight before them the road went on to Maresfield, in the south; but to the left a blind track cut out between the furze crossed the forest (forest, by courtesy, be it remembered) towards Rotherfield or the Wells.

Neale could bear witness because (not mentioned in the story) the Sisterhood he founded had its first home, early in 1855, at Rotherfield and when necessary 'he made nothing of walking the fourteen miles and back' to Sackville College, until in February 1856 when

we were coming down Shepherd's Hill at a good pace; in the steepest part the horse went

down like a shot, shooting the man out and me over him...lying on my back, with the wheel resting on my neck, the horse plunging and kicking...and my left hand tied by being caught in the reins, and twisted round by them to the shaft.²⁶

Gill's Lap, set soon after the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 (p.20), tells how Robert Histed, the rather priggish Anglican apprentice of Amos Charlwood, a dishonest Baptist grocer at Tunbridge Wells, when accompanying his master on a business trip to Crowborough (Robert's birthplace), Forest Row and its big house Kidbrook, is dropped off between Crowborough and the *Crow and Gate* to take a suddenly-thought-of message on foot to a customer in Rotherfield. He passes no-one on the way, finds no-one at home, makes his way leisurely back to 'the Wells' via Woodside, again seeing no-one except a stranger who asks the time, whereupon they hear Rotherfield church clock strike four. Back at the shop they are wondering why Mr Charlwood has not returned, and at Forest Row they wonder why he has not arrived, as Robert discovers next day on going to investigate. He and the constable retrace Charlwood's route and find his dead and injured body at Gill's Lap, a 'sullen clump of trees' on a prominent summit (Fig. 5). Robert, in his master's



Fig. 5. Ashdown Forest, with Gill's Lap on the horizon, photograph by Harold Connold, no.86 in his postcard series.

bad books for failing to let one of the lodging houses he owned because there had been fatal fever in it, is the obvious suspect and duly comes to trial at Lewes assizes. As the judge is summing up, however, Robert recognises a man who has just entered the court as the stranger he had encountered at Redgate Mill. The man, a farmer from Great-upon-Little near West Hoathly, having three times in the night heard a voice saying, 'Go to Lewes', corroborates Robert's story, and he is free. Six months later Charlwood's assassins, arrested for another offence, confess their guilt.

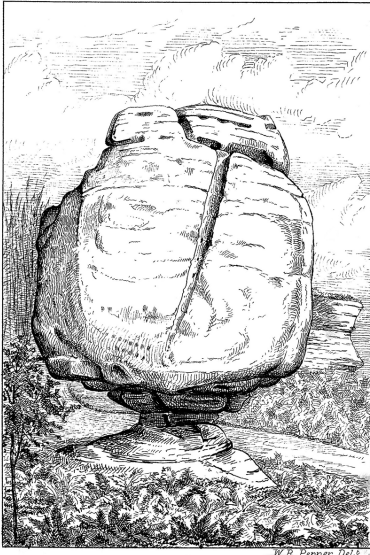
All the place-names are genuine and were well-known to Neale. The Forest remains open and, once Gills Lap has been located on the Ordnance Survey's Explorer map 18 (NGR TQ43 468319), the routes are traceable, save only where overwhelmed by Crowborough town. Woodside, 'on a lonely spur of Saxonbury Hill' (Fig. 6), was where he had brought two of the sisters to take turns living with and nursing a dying woman and her family from July 1855 to March 1856: 'such extremity of wretchedness', he wrote, 'I never saw but in Portugal.'²⁷ Great-upon-Little (Fig. 7) was another favourite picnic spot.²⁸ 'The Wells' is how 'we

Sussex people have now conveniently abbreviated' Tunbridge Wells (p.4). The personal knowledge even extends to Robert's father's occupation, shingling, 'for in Sussex, where we hold to old customs which have been lost everywhere else, we also hold to the covering of spires and church roofs...[with] shingles, bits of wood, that is, taken out of the very heart of oak, prepared in a peculiar manner, and put on after an equally peculiar fashion...requiring not only skill, but courage. It is not a pleasant thing – although I *have* been up there myself – to be swung up in a cradle to the top of one of our Sussex spires' (p.2).

The narrative style is more relaxed than in the earlier stories, well-paced and with some suspense. The digressions, the moralisings, the coincidences and the *coup de théâtre* are features that contemporary readers were accustomed to. The speech of the characters is appropriately differentiated, and the message is muted: 'If you were in such difficulty or danger that you could only be set free from it by a miracle, – why, then, a miracle would be wrought to preserve you', Robert's father assures him (p.1). "I wonder what there was in me", muses the farmer, "that GOD should have sent me



Fig. 6. Woodside, the Sisters' lodging in August 1855 while nursing the family that lived there, unattributed sketch from Sister Miriam's *Memoir*, 319b.



GREAT-UPON-LITTLE.

Fig. 7. The rock Great-upon-Little, sketched by William Reynolds Pepper of East Grinstead, from his guide book *East Grinstead and environs* (1885).

there just when I went.” Ah, Daniel Singleton! There you have mooted one of the most difficult questions in theology’ (pp.83–4).

Neale’s identification with Sussex verges on the promotional in the scene-setting; the following lines are the earliest instance of praise of Ashdown Forest I have ever found:²⁹

I confess that in winter the high table-land thereabouts [Crowborough Beacon] is as bleak and gloomy, and if the snow happens to be on the ground, as perplexing, as any place I ever saw: but then in the spring, when every nook and hollow of the southern side is absolutely golden with primroses, and from the north you look down on the first spring green of the old woods of Buckhurst, – woods in some sort coeval with the Conquest, – and the brighter, fresher tint of the young fir-groves that clothe acres on acres of the Warren, and the Surrey and Kent hills, of a blue that the bluest sky can hardly surpass, beyond both, – why, all I say is, that people often go further and fare worse; that they go to the Lakes or into Scotland, after scenery which is not equal to that which they might have within forty miles of London. (p.3; Fig. 8)

The identification is equally forcefully conveyed in *aural* scene-setting by employing authentic dialect vocabulary and pronunciation in both text and dialogue more plentifully than in the earlier stories. Examples are

A middle-aged, farmer-looking man, who was leaning over the parapet of the little bridge, or, as we should call it, *pinmold*, that here spanned the water; and seemingly watching the sports of three or four dragon-flies, (again, as we should call them, *adder-spears*,) that were skimming round and round the arch. (pp. 23f) “This here is a very queer business, sure-ly, Master Atkins”, said Joe. (p.27 [printed ‘sure-ly’ to indicate stress on second syllable])

In some later writers, with glossary to hand, Sussex speech is used patronisingly to characterise ignorant or stupid yokels, but in Neale’s case it brings together his respect for the old and poor and his linguistic scholarship, both of which are well illustrated in the books about him. When he arrived in Crawley in 1842 he ‘was quite delighted to hear the Sussex dialect again’ when catechising the children.³⁰ Later he bought a copy, now in private hands, of the first published edition of W. D. Cooper’s *Glossary of Provincialisms in use in Sussex*³¹ and inscribed it ‘J. M. Neale 1854 In this copy are to be entered the words picked up by the Sisters, when out nursing.’ The words imply that from the start the Sisters of St Margaret’s were charged with reporting any dialect terms they heard and that there was at least one other copy, presumably for words Neale already knew for himself or subsequently noticed in use by the collegians or local people. Annotations to words written in, such as ‘S.W.’, at Bee-biter (tom-tit), and ‘A’ at Bewraggle (to abuse), probably indicate the Sisters who heard the words in use. Sometimes the location and a contextualised illustration are also given, e.g. ‘Darnel Int[erjection]. An expression of impatience, or tense oath: as “*darnel* your young head!” – Rotherfield [S.A.]’. Other entries, however, are from other sources, e.g. at Cooper’s ‘Squat, s[substantive]. A piece of wood as a wedge, to stop a wheel on a road or declivity. S[outh Sussex]’, Neale writes “‘His duty knew, & acted as a squat’ Turley’, a quotation from a (now untraced) work by the contemporary East Grinstead poet John Turley.³² Valuably for the historian of such matters, he notes ‘and E. Grinsted’ by Twitten, and at Tye adds ‘Brambletye Holtye N.B. the accent is always on



Fig. 8. The South Downs seen from Ashdown Forest, watercolour drawing by A.R. Quinton, commissioned and issued as postcard by J. Salmon of Sevenoaks, 1911 or later; Gills Lap on the left.

the *tye*.' One word is added from Surrey, 'Clang s. A clique or clan. *Dorking*. S.A.'

All the relevant entries, and similar items from Neale's other works, I have included among what I have gathered of dialect vocabulary in the East Grinstead area from other sources in serialised form, with attributions and discussion, in successive issues of the now defunct *East Grinstead Museum Compass* from 1999 to 2008.³³ Further items from Neale, located subsequently, are being printed in the *Bulletin of the East Grinstead Society*.³⁴ Thanks to this rediscovery and publication, Neale's interest in Sussex dialect, 'totally overlooked in modern times', and pioneering deployment of it in prose fiction, have been set in their historical context and evaluated in Professor Richard Coates's comprehensive survey *The Traditional dialect of Sussex*.³⁵

Although Neale seems not to have employed Sussex dialect in his fiction until after acquiring Cooper's *Glossary*, he had already made sparing use of it in non-fiction. As early as 1843, in the Cambridge Camden Society's anonymous pamphlet *A few words to parish clerks and sextons of*

country churches, he wrote, with regard to rubbish brought in by birds: 'If jackdaws (or caddows) are allowed to come often ...', with a Sussex term in the parenthesis, albeit unacknowledged as such.³⁶ In *The Hymnal Noted*, published in two parts, 1852 and 1854, his translation of *Ad perennis vitae fontem* ('For the fount of life eternal') included a marginal note, against the line 'Lovely voices make a concert', 'Had I dared, I would have used our very pretty Sussex word, *chavish*. It means the sweet confusion of melody that birds, in springtime, make in a wood. – J.M.N.'.³⁷

The 'hybrid' mentioned earlier is probably best regarded as a young man's *jeu d'esprit* in the wrong publication. The subject of the third plate in the fourth part of the Cambridge Camden Society's *Illustrations of monumental brasses* (1846) is the magnificent brass of Thomas Nelond, 26th prior of Lewes, 1414–32, in Cowfold church, where it was assumed he had been buried. The text, by 'J.M.N.', compensates for the little that was then known about him by giving an account of his funeral in the form of a contemporary letter, before the factual discussion of the church and the brass. 'This was so

cleverly done in the English of the 15th century', recalled Neale's friend and fellow founding-member of the C.C.S. the Revd Edward J. Boyce in 1888, 'that he had several enquiries from philologists as to the genuiness of the document'. The opening lines give the flavour of the language:

Mayster Peter Nelond, cytizen of London and
goldsmith, to ye ryghte wurschypfull Mayster
Johan Brookys, Alderman of ye seide citey,
greeting.

Ryghte wurschypfull,

In min ryghte harti wise I commend me
untoe yowe.

After the discussion Neale printed what remained of the legend on the brass, beginning '*Hic terrae cumulus Thomae Nelond tegit ossa*', This mound of earth covers the bones of Thomas Nelond, followed by his own '15th-century' versified translation:

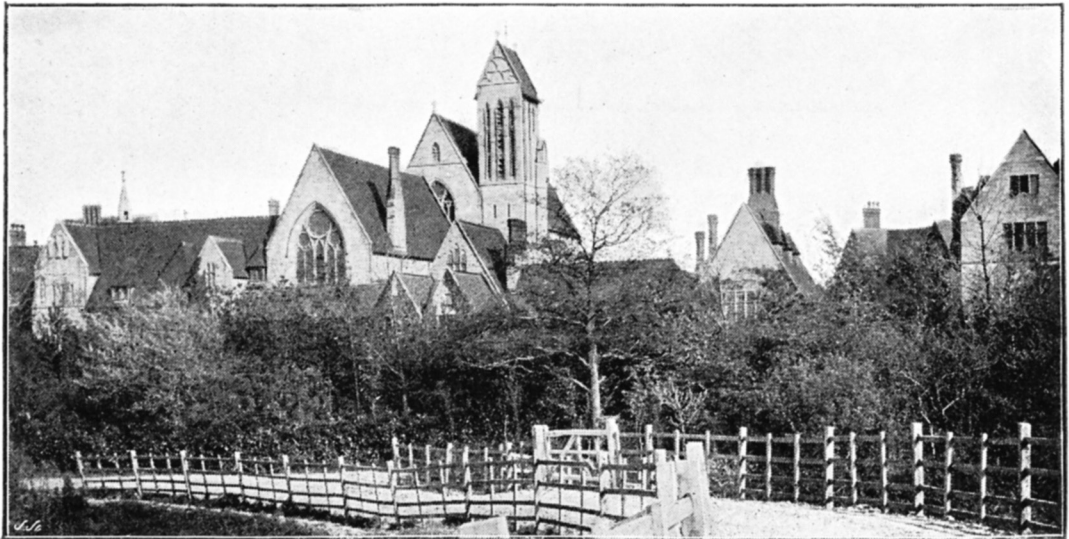
'Ryghte underneth the thys marble herse, heere
raisyd ffor to keepe....'³⁸

W. H. Blaauw, however, was not deceived, describing it in 1848, in the first volume of *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, as 'the mere creation of a modern writer's imagination. This may have been a well-intended fraud, but as it might get mixed up with genuine Sussex history, and has not before been openly exposed, though in print for some

years, and not disavowed by that society [C.C.S.], I trust its mention here will be excused.'³⁹ William Figg enumerated in less moderate wording its 'misstatements...put forth as known to be true, by the Rev. J.M. Neale of Sackville College' in volume 13 (1861), starting with the inaccurate dedications given for churches in Lewes as the cortège sets off.⁴⁰

How Neale reacted to these criticisms, if at all, we do not know; they are not mentioned in any of the published work about him. We do not even know if he was involved in any way when the Sussex Archaeological Society held its annual general meeting at East Grinstead in October 1861.⁴¹ Conceivably he boycotted it for the sake of peace because Dr J. H. Rogers, one of the assistant wardens at the College and his chief opponent locally, could have been involved; certainly Rogers was a member of the Society by 1862. Probably, though, Neale's range of commitments meant participation in a society peripheral to his main concerns would be too much to contemplate, especially as he was so well known as a controversial figure.

'Prior Nelond' was not Neale's first essay in pseudo-archaic English. In 1843 in a letter to Boyce he had used it to recount an anecdote, beginning 'Heere followyth a litel tale'.⁴² The Sisters of St Margaret's have in their library a work in three parts *Certain Godlie Gestes* [deeds] of *Christe's*



ST. MARGARET'S, EAST GRINSTEAD.

Fig. 9. St Margaret's Convent, East Grinstead, from the north; unattributed and undated postcard, c. 1910.

Constant Martyres and Confessors...by J.M.N., priest (London: Masters, 1854), in the same language throughout. I have not found it in any other library or bibliography; possibly only the one copy was printed. In mitigation of Neale's audacity in 'Prior Nelond' Sister Miriam remarked 'its writer followed in the steps of the President of the C.C.S., the Ven. T. Thorp, who, in an earlier number of the "Brasses" had avowedly given reign to his imagination in giving an account of "A Priest from North Mimms".'⁴² Dialect and archaism are only two aspects of Neale's fascination with language; he is said to have known 20 languages, ancient and modern, of which so far I have identified 14, in addition to English.

The etymology of Sussex place-names (as opposed to biblical ones) is considered only once in Neale's works, so far as I am aware, the assertion and surmise in c. 1852–3 respecting a stretch of Lewes Road in East Grinstead: 'The proper name of Cuttons Hill, as we now call it, is S. Katherine's Hill; I suppose because there was once a chapel there called S. Katherine's chapel.'⁴⁴ If he had evidence, a sermon was not the place to give it. No such 'proper'

name is recorded and, although pre-Reformation East Grinstead had a Brotherhood of St Catharine (of which Neale and his contemporaries might have been unaware), it did not have a chapel, nor any property in the area of Cuttons Hill. The name most likely derives from that of William Cotun, taxed in the Hundred of East Grinstead in 1327.⁴⁵

It might be thought that J. M. Neale's interest in dialect would extend to folk-tales, folk-song and dance, vernacular traditions and the like, but, with one exception, it did not. Preaching in Sackville College chapel on 1 November 1858 he refutes a proverbial local superstition known to the collegians: 'You all know, and I have often warned you against thinking so, how people in this part of the country believe that a hard death, as they say, is a bad death.'⁴⁶

True, he organised carol-singing in the street in East Grinstead, at midnight at Christmas and Easter, but it was reinvention of a custom rather than mere revival or rejuvenation; doctrinal purity and linguistic precision were his concerns, not 'heritage', still less an activity usually based in public houses, and the words were his own translations or



Fig. 10. St Margaret's Convent from the south-west, aerial photograph issued as postcard R11320 by Aerofilms and Aero Pictorial Ltd of Boreham Wood, early 1920s.

compositions. Hymnody was an important aspect of his scholarship and life's work, translating from Greek and Latin or composing his own in English, to drive out the linguistically and, to him, doctrinally faulty hymns then in use. Much attention is rightly given to them in the books about Neale, but the only Sussex record of what he opposed he reported from East Grinstead on Sunday 20 May 1848 in a letter to a friend:

They sang two [metrical] Psalms this afternoon in Church.

1. The De Profundis [Psalm 130] – ending every verse with Hallelujah:-
 "From lowest depths of woe
 To GOD I sent my cry,
 LORD, hear my supplicating voice,
 And graciously reply – Hallelujah!"
2. Psalm 8, ending thus-
 "When heaven, thy beauteous work on high
 Employs my wond'ring sight,
 The moon that nightly rules the sky,
 With stars of feebler light,"
 *The End.*⁴⁷

As with any writer, there are similar incidental glimpses in Neale's published work, including his letters and sermons, of events and conditions in and around the town where he lived which have not otherwise been recorded and are therefore worth the historian's seeking.

A notable example is the assertion, in preaching to the children of St Margaret's orphanage in 1859: Lepers 'were driven from among men [and] had to receive our Lord's Body and Blood through little windows in the outside of the Churches; if ever you go over to West Hoathly you may see one there.'⁴⁸ No physical evidence of such an aperture (now differently interpreted and usually called a squint) survives today, nor any depiction or documentation; unless this is momentary confusion with a different parish, it is a lost feature of which we would otherwise never have known. In the same year Neale told the orphans 'Here in Sussex we do not cultivate them [vetches] much: but in many parts of England they do...as food for cattle' and (in 1860) that there were vines at Sackville College when he first came to it⁴⁹ – sermon illustrations, not school syllabus content or random reminiscence. On 21 August 1849 he informs the same friend as before: 'We have had one case of cholera in the town, close to the College – a travelling Irishman: but he is getting over it.'⁵⁰

J. M. Neale was far from sentimentalising or idealising 'the folk' as some in a later generation were tempted to do. He knew the harsh realities of life in the countryside, and the limitations of and on its people. A sermon in Sackville College (unfortunately undated) on John 6.5, 'Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?', begins

This question, many of you may say, is not worth taking for a text. Why, we hear of it every day of our lives, – more especially now that prices are risen so high, and it is the hardest thing in the world to make both ends meet.... Half the people in this town are looking on to next week, wondering how much dearer things will become, – how much longer it will be possible to live on such wages and with such prices.⁵¹

It is not insignificant that Neale's concern for the poor found practical expression in Sussex, and started at a specific location within it. As early as 1843, Dr Lough has shown, he had been thinking deeply about the revival of the religious life in the Church of England and how it might be effected, characteristically arguing his case in a novel, *Ayrton Priory or the restored monastery*. Crucially, if the English church was truly catholic, then it could and must and would come about. At Sackville College his study window looked towards Ashdown Forest, idyllic-seeming whatever the season or the weather, but he knew that (in Sister Miriam's words)

[T]he whole countryside was mutely crying out.... The parish of East Grinstead and those adjoining it were of great extent, with scattered population; the clergy were very few, and insufficient. The dread of infection was so great among the poor that it was sometimes impossible to get anyone to nurse a fever case, and at hopping [hop-picking] time no one was at leisure for any nursing at all. Poor creatures were dying in lonely cottages without help for body or soul; in utter discomfort, and in the grossest ignorance. [Then he] conceived the idea of forming a community of women who should go and nurse these sick poor in their own hovels and care not only for their bodies but for their souls likewise. So St Margaret's Sisterhood began [in 1854–5].⁵²

Its early days are recounted in detail in the books about Neale, its origins and development have been traced in the context of the whole revival of the religious life in Anglicanism by P. F. Anson,⁵³

and its worldwide story has been told by one of the Sisters of the autonomous American branch.⁵⁴ For the purposes of this article it may be regarded as his abiding legacy, with its mother-house still in Sussex, in Uckfield High Street. The convent at East Grinstead, begun towards the end of Neale's life, is widely regarded as its architect George Edmund Street's masterpiece, now listed grade I and converted into apartments (Figs 9 and 10). Street also designed, without charge, Neale's gravestone in East Grinstead churchyard.

In February 1855 Street had responded to a request from Neale for a plan of a cottage hospital in connection with the Sisterhood, a year before the earliest record of that term in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which quotes Neale's intended conversion to such a purpose of the house in Rotherfield which had been the Sisters' home

until they settled in East Grinstead in June 1856. Nothing came of the idea, but Neale has the credit, and Sussex the honour, of pioneering the concept three years before its first realisation at Cranleigh in Surrey.⁵⁵

Naturally the sesquicentenary of Neale's death on 6 August 1866 was marked in 2016 by a church service and other events in East Grinstead, including the publication of a new booklet on the history of Sackville College.⁵⁶ I have tried to show that this lover and recorder of hitherto unregarded aspects of the county's landscape, history and language now deserves lasting regard everywhere in Sussex.

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NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In addition to the works of Sister Miriam, Mary Sackville Lawson and Michael Chandler mentioned in the text, there are two biographies. In 1906 the wife of the Revd Charles Towle of Bournemouth (the novelist Eleanor Taylor) produced, with the help of the family, *John Mason Neale D.D., a memoir* (Longmans Green & Co., London), largely a lightly edited selection from Sister Miriam's *Memoir* with hagiographical comments and a confusingly similar title. In 1975 the Revd Arthur George Lough published privately *John Mason Neale – priest extraordinary* (Hennock Vicarage, Devon) drawing on a wider range of sources than in his *Influence* but more hero-worshipping than critical.

There are independent, far from comprehensive, bibliographies of Neale's works in Mrs Towle's *Memoir*, expanded in Dr Lough's *Influence*, and by an American, the Revd William Harman Van Allen, in *Sackville College by the twenty-second Warden* [Frank Hill] (East Grinstead, 1913). Fifty years ago I attempted to compile an exhaustive list of published works by Neale or about him, including their various editions, and consulted the catalogues or shelves of the main academic, specialised and local libraries. It soon became apparent that some of them were first issued anonymously or with descriptive identifications, several of them in periodicals or multi-authored volumes. Virtually all were frequently reprinted up to the First World War and in the process went through more than one change of title, edition, revision, format and publisher. It may therefore be difficult to know which to take as definitive: the four volumes of *Sermons preached in Sackville College Chapel*, for instance, began life under the title *Readings for the Aged*, with the first book in the series appearing in 1850. The copy from which I quoted Neale's etymology of Cutton's Hill is *Sackville College Sermons* on the spine but *Readings for the Aged* on the title page. I abandoned the project but kept all my notes, which, by

my will, are destined for the West Sussex Record Office where they will be a permanent resource and basis for development. For this article I have, I think, quoted or cited enough for its intended purpose.

¹ Peter Brandon, "John Halsham", the perfect countryman', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* (hereafter SAC) **148** (2010), 213–24.

² Michael Chandler, *The life and work of John Mason Neale, 1818–66*. (Leominster: Gracewing, 1995). The principal earlier books about Neale are listed in the bibliographical note at the end of this article.

³ Being nearby, Blunt evidently acted for the patrons, his distant relatives the Clitherows. His brother-in-law was John Chandler, vicar of Witley whose curate, Edward Boyce, was Neale's friend from early Cambridge days and his future brother-in-law. Neale and Chandler were both interested in Englishing ancient hymns. See sources cited in notes 4, 5 and 6, and Stanley Godman (pers. comm., 9 July 1966).

⁴ His journal, Sister Miriam, *John Mason Neale, a Memoir*, 241a. I have followed the pagination devised by Dr Lough in his *The influence of John Mason Neale*, for details of which see note 5 below.

⁵ A. G. Lough, *The influence of John Mason Neale* (London: SPCK, 1962). The main subjects covered are Ecclesiology and church restoration, The revival of the religious life, Hymns, ballads and carols, Re-union with Rome, The Eastern Church and that of Holland, Trouble with the bishop, and The man and his achievement.

⁶ S. Godman, [Letters to the editor], *East Grinstead Observer*, 30 June and 21 July 1966; 'Dr J. M. Neale, Christian scholar and hymn-writer', *West Sussex Gazette*, 11 August 1966. Between July and September 1966 he and I shared our knowledge and understandings in frequent private correspondence.

- ⁷ Both reprinted in the Revd F. S. W. Simpson, *The churches of Shoreham*, 2nd edn (Gloucester: British Publishing Co., 1950), 27–30.
- ⁸ Sister Miriam, *Memoir*, 290–2.
- ⁹ O. H. Leeney, 'References to ancient Sussex churches in *The Ecclesiologist*, mainly as regards restoration and repair', *SAC* **83** (1942–3), 137–50; **84** (1944–5), 114–52; **86** (1947), 155–86; **87** (1948), 184–207; **88** (1949), 157–78.
- ¹⁰ *Sackville College by the twenty-second Warden* [Frank Hill] (East Grinstead: Farncombe & Co., 1913) is the only book-length history. The most recent and most thoroughly researched account is R. H. Wood's unpublished typescript 'Sackville College...some historical notes' (1972), copies of which are publicly available in the library and the Town Museum in East Grinstead.
- ¹¹ J. M. Neale, *A history of Sackville College* (London: Joseph Masters, etc., (n.d.) [1853 in British Library catalogue]).
- ¹² Sister Miriam, *Memoir*, 211b.
- ¹³ For discussion and interpretation see M.J. Leppard, 'Mount Noddy: Wealden iron or Wealden irony?', *Wealden Iron 2nd ser.*, **12** (1992), 27–8, and 'Mount Noddy', *East Grinstead Society Bulletin* (hereafter *EGSB*) **53** (Autumn 1993), 4.
- ¹⁴ Robert Lawson Gales (apparently a relation) regarded his *Sackville College sermons* as 'the most beautiful book in the English language (as word-perfect as [Coleridge's poem] *Christabel*)': R. L. Gales, 'J. M. Neale, Christian and Romantic', *The Oxford and Cambridge Review* (1910), reprinted in *Studies in Arcady 2nd ser.* (1912).
- ¹⁵ Mary Sackville Lawson, *Letters of John Mason Neale, selected and edited by his daughter* London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 301.
- ¹⁶ Lawson, *Letters*, 300.
- ¹⁷ *Poynings; a tale of the Revolution* (London: Masters and Burns, 1846, originally anonymous), 1–3.
- ¹⁸ Charles E. Clayton, 'Hangleton and its history', *SAC* **34** (1886), 171. Almost certainly the story was commissioned by the publisher for his series, and the illustration too, without reference to Neale and left to the artist (about whom I have been unable to find anything) to research or, more likely, imagine. Further investigation is not justifiable: 'Juvenile Englishmen' would not be bothered and the focus of this article is Neale's regard for Sussex.
- ¹⁹ W.H. Godfrey and L.F. Salzman, *Sussex Views selected from the Burrell collection*, Sussex Record Society (hereafter SRS), Jubilee volume (1951), plate 69.
- ²⁰ Annabelle Hughes notes similar chimneys in her caption to S. H. Grimm's 1785 view of Broadhurst House, Horsted Keynes, in John H. Farrant, *Sussex depicted: views and descriptions 1600–1800*, SRS **85** (2001), no.121.
- ²¹ J. M. Neale, *Lent Legends. Stories for children from church history* (London: Joseph Masters, 1855), **4**, 63–80.
- ²² Lawson, *Letters*, 339, 217.
- ²³ *Sermons preached in Sackville College Chapel by the late Rev. J.M. Neale* (hereafter *College sermons*) **3** (London: Masters, ed. of 1873), 168.
- ²⁴ *SAC* **1** (1848), 124. After the story had been published, vol. **13** (1861), 306, printed an explicit statement by Bishop Lake (1685–90) 'Thomas Winterbourn [sic], Clerk, is Warden.'
- ²⁵ Frequently reprinted (or summarised) thereafter; I have cited page-numbers from 1900 reprint by Parker & Co. of Oxford.
- ²⁶ Sister Miriam, 321f.b, quoting letters of 16 and 18 February 1856. Neale's parenthesis ensures that the reader does not imagine an expanse of dense woodland.
- ²⁷ Sister Miriam, 318b.
- ²⁸ Lawson, *Letters*, 339.
- ²⁹ Editor, 'Some opinions of Ashdown Forest' [a mini-anthology], *East Grinstead Museum Compass* (hereafter *EGMC*) **25** (Spring 2008), 14.
- ³⁰ Letter to Sarah Webster (shortly to be his wife), 29 May 1842, in Sister Miriam, 345.
- ³¹ William Durrant Cooper, *A glossary of provincialisms in use in the county of Sussex* (London: John Russell Smith, 2nd ed., 1853). The first edition had been printed for private circulation in 1834.
- ³² On John Turley (II) see M.J. Leppard, 'John Turley and his poems', *EGSB* **76** (Spring 2002), 16–17, and 'John Turley I and II', *EGSB* **77** (Autumn 2002), 11.
- ³³ M. J. Leppard, 'Dialect vocabulary of the East Grinstead area', *EGMC* **1** (1999) to **27** (Autumn 2008); see 11.
- ³⁴ *EGSB* **111** (Spring 2014), 11; **112** (Autumn 2014).
- ³⁵ Richard Coates, *The traditional dialect of Sussex* (Lewes: Pomegranate Press, 2010), 61, 233, 298.
- ³⁶ Coates, 121, quoting from the 1846 reprint, which gives the author's name.
- ³⁷ Mary Sackville Lawson (ed.), *Collected hymns, sequences and carols of John Mason Neale* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), 165.
- ³⁸ Boyce's letter and the full document, Sister Miriam, 131–6.
- ³⁹ *SAC* **1** (1848), 9.
- ⁴⁰ *SAC* **13** (1861), 7.
- ⁴¹ *SAC* **13** (1861), x–xi.
- ⁴² Lawson, *Letters*, 60.
- ⁴³ Sister Miriam, 132.
- ⁴⁴ *College sermons*, 3rd edn, **4** (London: Joseph Masters, 1872), 240: date of delivery from Introductory Notice and Preface.
- ⁴⁵ M.J. Leppard, 'Cuttons Hill', *EGSB* **109** (Summer 2013), 5.
- ⁴⁶ *College sermons* **2**, 334.
- ⁴⁷ Lawson, *Letters*, 107.
- ⁴⁸ J. M. Neale, *Sermons for children...addressed to the children of S. Margaret's home, East Grinstead*, 3rd edn (London: J. T. Hayes, 1872), 198.
- ⁴⁹ *Sermons for children*, 165, 53.
- ⁵⁰ Lawson, *Letters*, 124.
- ⁵¹ *College sermons* **2** (London: Joseph Masters, 1872), 95.
- ⁵² Sister Miriam, 306b.
- ⁵³ Peter F. Anson, *The call of the cloister*, 2nd edn rev. by A.W. Campbell (London: SPCK, 1964), 335–55.
- ⁵⁴ Sister Catherine Louise, *The planting of the Lord: the history of the Society of St Margaret in England, Scotland and the U.S.A., 1855–1995* (?Roxbury, MA: Society of St Margaret, c. 1995).
- ⁵⁵ M. J. Leppard, 'The prehistory of our hospital', *EGSB* **108** (Winter 2012–13), 7–8.
- ⁵⁶ M. J. Leppard, *A brief history of Sackville College* (East Grinstead: The Trustees of Sackville College, 2016).

