

## Chapter 30

# Extra, Extra, Read all about it!

Sheila Sleath and Robert Ovens

The area in and around the Gwash Valley is not short of stories and curiosities which make interesting reading. This chapter brings together a representative sample of notable personalities, place names, extraordinary events, both natural and supernatural, and tragedies including murder most foul!

The selected items cover a period of eight hundred years and are supported by extracts and images from antiquarian sources, documentary records, contemporary reports and memorials.

## A Meeting Place for Witches?

The name Witchley originates from the East and West Witchley Hundreds which, in 1086, were part of north Northamptonshire. However, following a boundary change a few years later, they became East Hundred and Wrangdike Hundred in the south-east part of Rutland. Witchley Heath, land lying within an area approximately bounded by Normanton, Empingham and Ketton, was named as a result of this historical association. It is shown on Morden's 1684 map and other seventeenth and eighteenth century maps of Rutland. Witches Heath, a corruption of Witchley Heath, is



*Kitchin and Jeffery's map of 1751 showing Witches Heath*

shown on Kitchin and Jeffery's map of 1751.

The area of heathland adjacent to the villages of Normanton, Ketton and Empingham became known locally as Normanton Heath, Ketton Heath and Empingham Heath. By the nineteenth century the whole area was

better known as Empingham Heath. The name Witchley was, however, retained in Witchley Warren, a small area to the south-east of Normanton Park, and shown on Smith's map of 1801. Witchley Warren Farm, halfway along the road from Normanton to Ketton, was named after this area.

Wytchley Warren Farm, Wytchley Warren Long Covert and Wytchley Warren Spinney on today's maps mark the site of Wichele which was within the Forest of Rutland at the end of the thirteenth century. Their names remind us of this link with the past. When Edward I relinquished the eastern part of the forest he retained Wytchley as his personal property, the only royal warren in Rutland.

A warren was an area of land which varied in size from a small field up to a square mile or more. Its purpose was to breed rabbits for food, and it was usually owned by the lord of the manor, who employed a warrener to look after it.

## Empingham Heath

The coming of age celebrations of the fourth Sir Gilbert Heathcote of Normanton were held on Empingham Heath in 1794. The heath was also an important venue for horse racing as the following advertisement in the *Stamford Mercury* on 11th June 1724 shows:

‘On Thursday, the 25th of this Instant June, will be run for on Empingham Heath, in the county of Rutland, a purse of Thirty Pound or upwards, by Galloways 14 Hands or under, nine Stone the highest, to allow Inch and half-stone. Every Horse, Mare or Gelding, belonging to a Contributor, to pay Two Guineas Entrance. The winning Horse, etc., to be sold for Forty Guineas. Every Horse, etc., that runs for this Plate, to be shewn and entered at the White Horse, in Empingham, on Thursday, the 18th Instant, between the hours of Four and Six in the Afternoon, before William Rowlate, Clerk of the Race, and to be kept in the town of Empingham till the Day of Running. To Run according to Articles.’

*J & C Walker's map of 1878. Witchley Warren and Ketton Heath are shown, but not Witchley Heath*

*Below: Wytchley Warren Farm from the south-west in 2005 (RO)*



## Murderer Pardoned

The Rev E A Irons, Rector of North Luffenham, 1900-23 researched medieval and later church court records and similar documents, from which he prepared his ‘Notes’. These cover every parish in Rutland and are well-known to local historians. They provide a fascinating insight into a little known aspect of Rutland’s history. One account is of a murder perpetrated in the reign of Edward III. The following is a modern translation of this account:

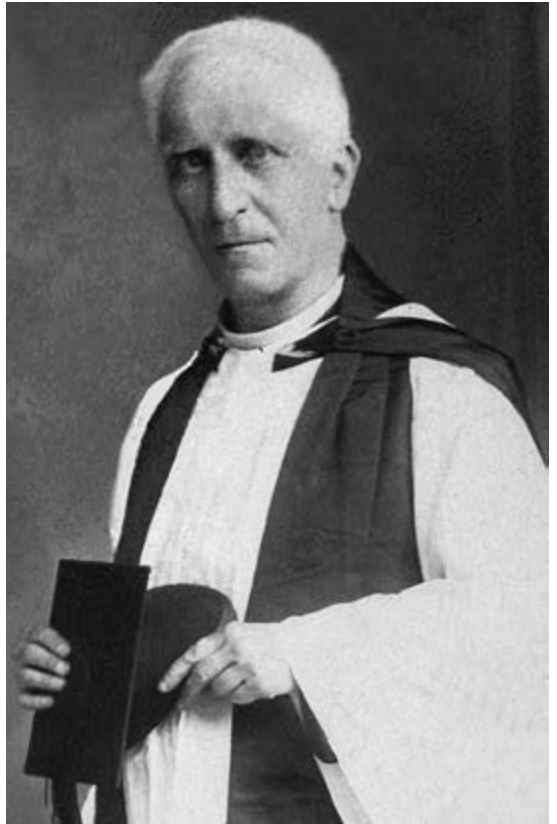
In January 1375, John, the son of Simon, was charged with killing another John, the son of Henry, at Normanton. Both men lived in Whitwell. It appears that they had been involved in an argument in Whitwell Fields, Normanton, as a result of which John, the son of Henry, struck the other John on the head with a stick causing him to fall to the ground. However, he managed to get up and run ‘towards the great water which he could not cross as it was too deep’. The injured man turned on his pursuer and in self defence struck him on the head with a stick. His injuries were so severe that

he died. The court found that John, son of Simon, was not guilty of murder, and he was pardoned.

## A Cure for Sore Eyes

On the north side of Burley Road, Oakham, about a quarter of a mile east of the Odd House Inn, is the site of Our Lady's Well. It is described in the Rev Thomas Cox's *New Survey of Great Britain*, (1720-31) as follows:

'In ancient Times, before the Reformation, there was a Custom among the devout People of this Nation, and especially of these Parts [Oakham], to go on Pilgrimage in Honour of the blessed Virgin *Mary*, to a Spring in this Parish, about a Quarter of a Mile from the Town, which is still known by the Name of our Lady's Well, near which we may perceive in several Places the Foundations of an House or two remaining; but that which will confirm our Belief of such an Usage, is a Record found in the Firstfruits Office, containing, among other Things these Words, That very many Profits and Advantages belonging and appertaining to the Vicarage of *Okeham* did consist in divers Obventions and Pilgrimages to the Image of the Virgin *Mary* at the Well, and St. *Michael* the Archangel, and diverse other Rites and Oblations, which now are quite abolished, with the Benefits and Advantages which accrued there-from to the Vicar.'



*The Rev E A Irons, Rector of North Luffenham Church 1900-23 (Churchwardens of North Luffenham)*

*The location of 'Lady Well' on Murray's map of Rutland dated 1830*



A century on, local people still had faith in the healing powers of the spring water. It was considered to be particularly valuable for treating sore eyes, especially if applied after a pin had been thrown in the well.

Although the well is no longer a shrine or visited for its healing powers, the site has been preserved. It is now managed as a nature reserve by Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust. A nearby road has been named Ladywell as a reminder of the area's historical link with the past.



## Midget Pie

Jeffrey Hudson was born in Oakham to a Roman Catholic family in 1612. His father John, who had been a butcher in the town, was employed by the Duke of Buckingham to work on his estate at Burley on the Hill where he bred bulls for baiting. He presented Jeffrey to the Duchess of Buckingham and she took him into her service in 1628. It is said that she clothed him in satin and appointed two servants to attend to his needs.

Jeffrey is often called a dwarf but this may be an incorrect description. He was illustrated by artists of the day as being a well proportioned young man, thus suggesting that he was a midget. Many accounts have been published about him. Slight variations in the telling are inevitable, but it is apparent that he led an adventurous life. The following is an early account of his life from *New Survey of Great Britain* (1720-31):

*'Jeffrey Hudson the Dwarf, memorable upon many Accounts; he was the Son of John Hudson a Person of a mean Condition, but of a lusty Stature, as were all his other Children . . . At 7 Years old being scarce 18 inches high, he was taken into the Family of the late Duke of Buckingham, at Burley on the Hill in this County, as a Rarity in Nature; and the Court being then in a Progress, he was put into a cold Pye, and served up to the Table. After the Marriage of King Charles I. with the Princess Henrietta Maria of France, he was presented to that Queen, and became her Dwarf. When the Rebellion broke out, he became a Captain of Horse in the King's*



*Above: King Charles I and Jeffrey Hudson (Rutland Magazine V opp 21)*

*Left: The supposed birthplace of Jeffrey Hudson in Melton Road, Oakham (RO)*



Service, till he went over with the Queen into *France*, where having the Misfortune to kill one Mr. *Crofts*, Brother of the Lord *Crofts*, in a Combat on Horseback, he was expelled the Court. Being put now to his Shifts, he went to Sea, and was taken by a *Turkish* Pyrate, who carried him to Barbary, where he was sold, and remained a Slave for many Years. He was at last redeemed, and coming into *England* lived several Years upon certain Pensions allowed him by the Duke of Buckingham, and some other Noblemen; but being a Papist, and going to *London* when the Popish Plot, in 1678, was in Agitation, he was taken up and clapt into the *Gate-house*, and lay there some considerable Time, but was at length enlarged, and died about the Year 1682. It is further observable of this Person, that from the 7th Year of his Age, when . . . he was not above 18 Inches high, till he came to be 30 Years of Age . . . he never grew any Thing considerable; but after it, he shot up in a little Time to the Height he continued to his Death, viz. about 3 Foot and nine Inches, which he attributed to the Hardships he underwent in *Turky*.’



### Jeffrey Hudson Memorabilia

There are a number of published drawings and sketches which bear little or no resemblance to Jeffrey Hudson. Paintings by Daniel Mytens commissioned by King Charles I in 1630 are considered to be the most accurate. Today there is much local interest in Jeffrey and many items of memorabilia have been privately collected in commemoration of this local celebrity.

*Top Right: A modern stone statue of Jeffrey Hudson (RO)*

*Centre right: A Jeffrey Hudson weathervane (RO)*

*Bottom right: Jeffrey Hudson Bitter brewed by a local brewery (RO)*

*Right: This Rutland Independence teapot depicts Jeffrey Hudson emerging from a pie (RO)*





## The Last Public Hanging in Rutland

William and Richard Weldon were baptised on 7th August 1763 and 20th April 1766, the sons of Mary and Richard Weldon of Lower Hambleton.

On the evening of 15th November 1788 John Freeman, a baker of Edith Weston, made his return journey home on horseback from Oakham market. Nearing home, he was ‘most barbarously murdered’ about half a mile distance from Hambleton, his head ‘being almost beat to a mummy, and his skull most shockingly fractured’ (*Stamford Mercury*, 21st November 1788). The coroner’s inquest returned the verdict, ‘Wilful murder by some person or persons unknown’. The newspaper article continued:

‘The depravity of human nature was never more evinced than in the above horrid murder. It does not appear that the unfortunate man had any ways offended his cruel murderers, or that he in particular was chose out for their victim, but that the first person who came that way was to feel their vengeance, as in order to effect their savage purpose, they had fastened the gate thro’ which every horseman must pass.

‘A pole was taken from a hay-stack in a close, adjoining, and tines of a fork were found near to the place where the bloody deed was committed, and from which it appears the deceased received his death blows, whilst endeavouring to open the gate. His pockets were rifled of a ten pound Stamford banknote, and eight guineas.’

John Freeman’s wife, Mary ‘had been deprived of a tender husband, and a young family of an affectionate father’. He was buried at Edith Weston

*John Freeman’s route from Oakham to Edith Weston would have been via Egleton and Nether Hambleton. It is superimposed on Letts’ map of circa 1883*

*Left: A vivid portrayal of the barbarous murder of John Freeman. This is one of three illustrations, originally drawn by R C Chatburn for the Northampton and County Independent in 1980. They were presented to Rutland County Museum by the artist (RCM)*



given him a share of the plunder. Richard kept the banknote and through this was traced to Empingham, Stamford in Lincolnshire and Barnack and Elton, Huntingdonshire, where eventually Mr Smith, a butcher, exchanged it for cash. Richard was arrested and on further examination both brothers were committed to Oakham Gaol on the following day, to be tried at the next assize.



*The location of the County Gaol (ringed) on a map of Oakham prepared in 1787 for the Earl of Winchilsea (ROLLR DE 3443 / DG7)*

During the afternoon of Sunday 8th February 1789 the gaoler, Henry Lumley, as was his practice, went into the room where Richard Weldon was usually confined in the daytime. He took William, Richard's brother with him in order to pray with them. In a premeditated attack, Richard Weldon struck Mr Lumley on the side of his head with a large faggot stick, fracturing his skull. William knew nothing of his brother's intention and prevented him from striking Lumley again. Richard then left the room, having locked his brother and another prisoner inside, and went to make his escape through the gaoler's house. However Mrs Lumley, on hearing the noise of Richard's ankle irons, looked out of the window and on seeing the prisoner raised the alarm. Local townspeople caught Richard before he could make good his escape.

Mr Lumley did not survive the attack and died the following day. The coroner's inquest brought a verdict of wilful murder against Richard Weldon.

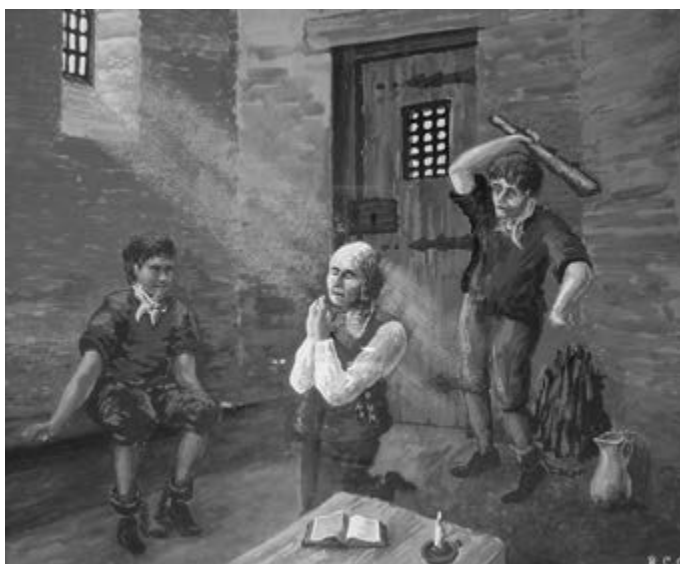
The brothers were brought to trial at the Oakham Assizes before Baron Thompson on Saturday 14th March 1789. An extract from an old newspaper 'kindly lent by Mr. R.L. Healey of Hambleton' was published in Matkin's *Oakham Almanack* (1897) under the heading 'An Account of the Trial and Behaviour of William Weldon & Richard Weldon'. Their parents were described as 'poor people, who seem utterly to have neglected giving their

children any education . . . and, excepting their having the human shape, can scarcely be allowed to enjoy any of the faculties with which man in general is endowed'.

The court was crowded. William Weldon pleaded not guilty, Richard pleaded guilty. When all of the evidence had been presented the learned judge exhorted the jury:

' . . . in the most serious manner, not to pay any attention to what they had heard out of court respecting the bloody transaction, nor to Richard

*Richard Weldon prepares to strike gaoler Henry Lumley (RCM)*



Weldon having pleaded guilty; but to attend only to the evidence that they had heard in court; and if they entertained any doubt of their guilt, to lean on the side of mercy.’

It only took the jury a few minutes to conclude that both prisoners were guilty. When the judge passed sentence ‘in the most affecting manner’ it ‘drew tears from many of the spectators, but seemed to have little effect on

the two unhappy men’. Baron Thompson ordered that after both men had been hanged their bodies were ‘to be afterwards delivered to the surgeons to be dissected and anatomised’. The brothers were hanged on Monday 16th March 1789 and it was ordered that their bodies were to be suspended in chains near to the place where the murder of John Freeman was perpetrated.

The Rev Richard Williams, Vicar of Oakham from 1782 to 1805 and chaplain to the gaol,

*This Day is published, Price Four-Pence,*  
**THE TRIAL OF**  
**William and Richard Weldon,**  
 Before **BARON THOMPSON.**  
**AT OAKHAM.**  
 On **SATURDAY the 14th of MARCH, 1789.**  
 FOR THE MURDER OF  
**Mr. JOHN FREEMAN, of Edith-Wetton;**  
**(AS TAKEN BY A GENTLEMEN IN COURT):**  
**WITH THEIR CONFESSIONS.**  
 And an Account of the MURDER of Mr. LUMLEY,  
 Gosler, at Oakham.

Stamford. Printed by NEWCOMB and PEARCE; and sold by  
 R. Newcomb, Stamford; W. Brooke, John Drury, and Joshua  
 Drewry, Lincoln; Preston, Boston; Booth, Caistor; Cooke, Up-  
 pingham; Horden, Peterboro'; Ellis, Horncastle; Allin and Ridge,  
 Newark; Sheardown, and Martha. Louth; Whaley, and Allen,  
 Grantham; Atkin, Spalding; Worley, Alford; Hicks, Oakham;  
 right, and Allen, Melton; and by all Booksellers and Newsvendors

*This  
 publication of  
 an account of  
 the Weldon trial  
 was  
 advertised in  
 23rd March  
 1789 edition of  
 the Stamford  
 Mercury*

was in attendance at the hangings. The publication continued:

‘Before their arrival at the gallows, and when there, they both confessed to the crime for which they suffered. Richard also confessed to having committed a number of petty thefts; and declared it had been his intention to murder Mr. Hippisley, Mr. Stimson, Mr. Freer, Mr. Needham, and Mr. Rott, all of Hambleton. Also Mr. Bunning, of Kilthorpe, and his servant maid.’

Not only was this believed to be the last public hanging at Oakham, it was possibly the last gibbeting to take place in Rutland. Matkin’s *Oakham Almanack* (1902) reported that the gibbet post survived for some 50 years until it was sawn down and turned into a gatepost and that it was still ‘doing duty as a gate post on some farm premises a short distance away’. Part of the irons at that time were at Hambleton, and the balance at Deeping, Lincolnshire.



*Part of Owen and Bowen’s map of 1720 showing the site of the gallows near to Mount Pleasant, Oakham*



## Prosecution and Execution Costs

George Phillips in 'The Annals of Rutland' (*Rutland Magazine* IV, 156) noted the following details in the Quarter Session Records: 'Prosecution of Wm. and Richard Weldon and for twenty nine witnesses Lent Assize 1789 £67 for the murder of Freeman. Prosecution of the said Richard Weldon and for eight witnesses at the said Assizes £12.10.0 for the murder of Gaoler Henry Lumley. John Grant for Gallows £2.8.4. Rev. Mr. Williams for attending Prisoners £10.10.0.'



## Dick Christian

Dick Christian, baptized on 6th March 1779 at Cottesmore, became a horse breaker and was known as 'the Emperor of rough-riders'. He gave the following eyewitness account of the Weldon brothers' execution and gibbeting which is recorded in G Paget's *The Flying Parson* and Dick Christian:

'That's Gibbet Gorse [Hambleton], as fine a cover as ever was seen. I saw those two brothers hanging on the gibbet, with white caps on; they murdered a baker called Freeman. I was only seven when they were hung [at Oakham]; I stood on my father's pony, and looked over his shoulder; I wasn't ten yards off them. The youngest of them, Bill, father had hired him to be a shepherd; he had been at our place only a week before he was took, to settle about coming. Poor fellow, he cried sadly; his brother Dick, he was a regular hardened one – you know what he said about not dying in his shoes: I heard him say it distinct. He could see Appleton [Hambleton], the village he lived at, from the gallows, and he turns his face right towards it, and he says, "Now I'll prove my mother's a liar; she always said I'd die in my shoes". Them were his very words; and away he kicks them among the crowd. I think I see him a-doing it. Father went quite white, and fairly trembled in his saddle. They had chains from the waist down between their legs, and they hung on the gibbet that way. That was a great plum year, but there was no sale for them round Oakham; people wouldn't buy them if a fly had been at them; they had a notion that they'd been at the gibbet, and sucked the flesh. I took no notice of it: I always ate plums when I could get them. They hung [on the gibbet] till they fell down; the good one [Bill] lasted the longest; people watched for that. I never heard of anyone finding bits of their bones; I've seen parts of their clothes lying about when we've been drawing the gorse, but never no bones; they say they're not to be seen. That green field on the left where the sheep's feeding, just on this side of the windmill, is where they were hung.'

*The bodies of  
the Weldon  
brothers  
hanging from  
the gibbet near  
Lower  
Hambleton  
(RCM)*

## Gibbet Gorse and Gibbet Lane

Gibbet Gorse lies on the south shore of Rutland Water, across from Hambleton. On the First Edition OS 1" map of 1824 it is called Gibbet Cover. Prior to this it was called Weldon's Gibbet on a map of 1806.

Before the construction of Rutland Water the lane from Edith Weston to Gibbet Gorse was traditionally known as Gibbet Lane. Although only a short length of this lane remains, residents still refer to it as Gibbet Lane.



*From the OS 1st ed 1" map 1824 showing Gibbet Cover and Gibbet Lane (highlighted)*

## Crackers Galore!

The 17th April 1789 edition of the *Stamford Mercury* reports on a remarkable firework display at Burley on the Hill in celebration of George III's 'happy recovery' [from porphyria]:

“The right hon. the earl of Winchelsea, lord lieutenant of the county of Rutland, appointed Monday last for a public rejoicing on his majesty's recovery, at his lordship's seat at Burley. An elegant entertainment was given on the occasion to the nobility, gentry, freeholders, and his lordship's tenants, all of whom received a general invitation.

‘His lordship having engaged an eminent fire worker from London, a scene beautiful beyond description was exhibited in the large court in front of the house, at night. Amidst a variety of works was a pyramid 15 yards high, and a transparency, representing a medallion of his majesty suspended by two cherubs, bearing a crown, *G. III.* Beneath, “*Long Live the King*”. The bust was in a glory; at top of the pyramid was a large crown, and a little



*Burley on the Hill, the scene of the firework display in 1789, was built 1694-1708 by Daniel, 2nd Earl of Nottingham (Hart)*

below on each side, the letters G. R. which with the corresponding works around, surpassed any thing ever seen in this part of the country. At intervals rounds of cannon were fired, together with repeated shouts of the populace, producing a pleasing awful effect . . . The ballroom was crowded, and the company continued dancing till after 5 o'clock on Tuesday morning.

‘The house and court yard was, literally speaking, like a fair, for many hours. It is supposed that near 4,000 people were entertained.

‘In the left colonnade, was placed a very large quantity of ale, bread, &c. which was distributed to the populace so liberally, that near two hogsheads of liquor were obliged to be returned again into the cellar.

‘The whole entertainment was conducted in that true stile of old English hospitality, which reflects the biggest honor on the noble donor, and will ever be remembered by his guests.

‘In the midst of the jollity an ungrateful rascal took an opportunity of stealing three hats and some napkins. It gives us pleasure to add, that he was detected, and likely to be dealt with according to his deserts.’

## Burley Hermitage

The Hermitage at Burley was not what its name suggested. It was a wooden structure in Burley Woods used as a summer house by the owners of Burley on the Hill. It was evidently a favourite retreat for the young ladies of the house who would often have their meals there. It was wantonly destroyed by fire in 1965.

The following extract describing the Hermitage is from the *Rutland Magazine* (IV, 124-5):



‘The building, which has a rustic appearance, is constructed almost entirely of wood. The crevices are filled with furze, and the roof is thatched with reeds. The front of the structure is open lattice work. The interior consists of two rooms, one evidently having been used as a sleeping apartment, as it contains a straw bed covered with fibre matting. There is, also, in this room a fire place composed of rough stones, and the smoke is conducted to the outside by means of a chimney, built of similar material, which rises several feet above the roof of the building.

‘The front room is furnished with chairs, benches and tables, having a home-made rustic appearance. They are disfigured with the names and initials of visitors, a propensity too much indulged in by English people, whether at home or abroad. It must be an annoyance, and it is certainly an eyesore, not only to the owner, but to all lovers of such relics of the past, to



see sprawling letters, large and deep, cut into the trees and on every available place both inside and outside the building. After seeing so many examples of this reprehensible practice, one is forced to the conclusion that there are a large number of people afflicted with a peculiar disposition to revert, in another form, to the claw sharpening propensity of a far distant ancestor.

‘The floor of the interior is tastefully paved with pebbles, and the knuckle bones of sheep. They are laid in a mosaic pattern and enclose the letter W., supposed to be the initial of the Earl of Winchelsea, a former owner of the property.

‘The figures 1807 also appear on the floor, indicating, it may be presumed, the date of the erection.

‘There is no authentic record to show how or for what purpose the building was erected, but in all probability it was built for and used as a summer house or picnic lodge.’

*An artist's  
impression of the  
interior of the  
Hermitage in  
Burley Woods  
(David Carlin)*



## Lockjaw and Suicide

On Friday 16th May 1817 Drakard's *Stamford News* reported the following unfortunate accounts. The first concerned the death of Joseph Sutor of Hambleton, who was buried under the authority of the coroner on 30th April. Joseph, the son of Ann Sutor, was baptized at Hambleton on 11th November 1792:

‘An inquest was lately held at Hambleton, Rutland, on the body of a poor fellow, who died of a lock-jaw, occasioned by a wound he received in his foot when chopping wood for the Earl of Winchelsea, on the 3rd of April, although surgical assistance was immediately had. He lived a week after the beginning of his lock-jaw [tetanus]. Verdict – accidental death.’

Another inquest was held in Hambleton on the body of Mary Shilaker who drowned herself in a shallow part of the River Gwash. She was buried on 10th May 1817 at Hambleton again under the authority of the Coroner. She was just 20 years of age:

{[An inquest was held] . . . on the body of Mary Shilaker, a servant maid, who drowned herself in a shallow part of the river, for which rash act no cause could be assigned. She went out at six o'clock in the morning to fetch up her master's cows, and having brought three, returned for the others, but was not seen again until her body was found where we have stated. Verdict – lunacy.}



*The Hambletons on a map dated 1878 by J & C Walker. Mary Shilaker met her death in the River Gwash below Middle Hambleton*

## The Wise Woman of Wing

Amelia Woodcock, the daughter of John and Elizabeth Dexter, was born about 1816 at Barleythorpe. In 1841 she was living with her parents, brother James and sister Catherine at Hambleton. In January 1842, she married Matthew Woodcock, a stonemason, who had been born in the village, and they made their home at Eggleton. Later that year their first child Mary Ann was born. By 1845 they had moved to Wing where four more children, Lillah, John, Charlotte and Harriet, were born between then and 1854. Another child, Georgiana, was baptised at Eggleton in January 1857.

It was at Wing that Amelia acquired the title 'The Wise Woman of Wing'. She was evidently clever in the cure of slight wounds, and villagers always visited her with their ailments. Stories about her ability to treat the sick soon spread to the surrounding district, and by 1851 an extraordinary number of sufferers believed in her healing powers. As a result, her reputation became widespread and hundreds of ailing people were drawn to the once quiet village of Wing. It was difficult for Amelia to cope with this influx. Such a constant and high volume of patients meant that there was no way that she could give immediate consultations. It was therefore of great financial advantage to the local publicans, shopkeepers and cottagers, who were able to accommodate the many visitors. It is difficult to imagine the impact that Amelia's popularity had upon this rural community.

Some people believed that Amelia was either a charlatan or a witch. However it appears that she was guilty of nothing more than possessing a remarkable knowledge for making herbal medicines and salves.

Much of her doctoring was carried out at Wing, but her obituary in 29th May 1863 edition of the *Stamford Mercury* states that:

'The house at Wing becoming too small, she bought a house at Oakham, and established an omnibus to meet the various railway trains. Mrs Woodcock was rather of a retiring disposition but her amount of work was very large, and it is surprising how she was able to get through so much.'

It is not known when Amelia moved to Oakham, but she was living there in 1857. Her house was at Mount Pleasant, on the southern outskirts of the town. Whilst there, Dick Christian, in Paget's *The Flying Parson and Dick*

On 10th September 1852 the *Stamford Mercury* featured two accounts detailing a little of Amelia's life and activities at Wing. One was 'furnished by a respectable correspondent at Oakham' who gave 'one view of her pretensions', the other 'from an equally respectable source at Uppingham':

**Oakham correspondent:**

'It had been stated in some of the communications to the local papers that only ignorant, vulgar, and poor people visit her, which is quite contrary to the fact, for each day in the week vehicles of every description may be seen in the place, and many people of high respectability daily apply to her. The fact cannot be denied that she has cured and relieved many; and in this neighbourhood cures have been made by her when medical men have given patients up as incurable, or have intimated that a limb must be amputated. She has at the present time the wife of one medical man and the daughter of another under her care. The village is now completely full of lodgers, and respectable people too, – not the "poor, ignorant, and vulgar"; and Wing has the appearance of a small watering place so far as regards the strangers there. Indeed it is quite a common thing for 200 people daily to make application to the woman. Witchcraft has been imputed to her, but she is no more a witch, nor uses what is usually termed witchcraft, than those who make such unfounded statements. It is true the woman has not had a refined education, but where is the person who would not be cured of the "ills which flesh is heir to" because the party administering the remedy has not obtained a diploma? The Midland Railway must be great gainers by the doctress, for scarcely a day passes but 50 or 60 people alight at the Manton station, and no less than three licensed vehicles are generally employed to convey patients from the station to the village and back. People from almost all quarters of England have visited her, and Scotland and Wales have contributed their portion of the poor, ignorant and deluded people.'

**Uppingham correspondent:**

'We have received other communications showing the extraordinary excitement this woman is causing among invalids. We are assured that last week she had upwards of 300 patients in her books, and that two persons who went to visit her on Thursday had to wait till Saturday before their turn arrived for an interview. The age of the woman is between 30 and 40: she is the wife of a labourer, can neither read nor write, and is very brusque in her manner. It is stated that she has seen something of gypsy life, and thus probably required a knowledge of the properties of herbs. It is also said she gained some experience in Stamford Infirmary, where she was a patient, and afterwards as a nurse. A story is current that having succeeded on curing two patients of cancer, a neighbouring medical practitioner offered a large sum for her recipe to which she replied, "I received the gift of cure from God and I do not barter God's gifts". She has now a secretary, who records the names of her visitors as they call and they are ushered to her presence in the order of their application.'

**Extracts from articles about Amelia Woodcock in the *Stamford Mercury*:**

**17th September 1852:**

'It has been understood that the medicine administered by this famous woman to her patients would almost have the effect of raising the dead, but this week there has been an example to the contrary. A patient living in a village not far from Stamford having occasion for the much coveted compound, employed a neighbour to procure it from Wing, and he was supplied with a tolerably large sized bottle. On the road home, the man's curiosity prompted him to "a taste" when to his surprise, he found "it not so bad after all", and continued to take occasional sips until his gait became rather unsteady under its stimulating influence. He, however, not being satisfied with his sipping, took a "strong pull", the effect of which was that he was found by the road side *dead drunk*.'

**17th February 1854:**

'An inquest was held at Oakham, on Friday last before J. F. Jones, Esq. coroner, on the body of a young man, 20 years of age, named Oliver Epery, who had come from Earith, Hunts., and had been a patient for some weeks in the house of Mrs Woodcock, better known as the "Wise Woman of Wing" and who died suddenly there on the previous Wednesday night. There being no evidence as to the immediate cause of death, the jury returned a verdict that the deceased died from *natural causes*.'





*Amelia lived with her family in this cottage in City Yard, Wing. It was here that she began to dispense medicines and salves to those who consulted her about their ailments (Hart)*

*Christian*, described her as ‘the doctress lady . . . her that makes the wind pills. I’ve heard she’s got as many as one hundred and fifty patients; she takes two or three days to get once through ’em’.

Amelia died at Mount Pleasant on 24th May 1863 at the young age of 47 years. Perhaps she died of over-work, something she had no medicinal cure for. After Amelia’s death, Matthew, her husband, continued to live at Oakham until at least 1871. He died at Eggleton in 1877. Both Amelia and her husband chose to be buried at Hambleton.

The headstone of Amelia Woodcock, The Wise Woman of Wing, and her husband Matthew is in the south-east corner of Hambleton churchyard.

**The inscription reads:**

**In  
MEMORY  
of  
MATTHEW WOODCOCK  
WHO DIED APRIL 21ST 1877  
Aged 58 years  
ALSO OF  
AMELIA WIFE OF THE ABOVE  
WHO DIED MAY 24TH 1863  
Aged 47 years**

## Old Herbal Remedies

The majority of the salves and medicines used by Amelia would have been made from herbs gathered from the fields and woods. The following plants could have been used by Amelia:



*Far left: Betony was evidently one of Amelia's favourite herbs. It was used to clear the head from over-imbibing, to alleviate shortness of breath and, when mixed with 'Hogges Lard', to ease wounds (aphotoflora.com)*



*Left: Dandelion contains a number of bitter ingredients which act as an aid to digestion (aphotoflora.com)*



*The narcotic qualities of Field Poppy are legendary (aphotoflora.com)*



*Left: The drug obtained from Herb Robert has been of interest to folk healers for centuries. It has astringent properties and is a mild diuretic (aphotoflora.com)*



*Left: Celandine is a favourite plant used by healers. It is believed to have powers which sharpen or correct vision (aphotoflora.com)*

## A Remarkable Escape

In the *Rutland Magazine* (II, 61) Edward Costall, at some time 1st Lieutenant in the Rutland Militia, relates the following tale:

‘A man named Knight, of Burley-on-the-Hill, joined the Militia, and after serving for a year volunteered into the Coldstream Guards, and at the outbreak of the War with Russia went with his regiment to the Crimea, and was in the battle of the Alma, which was fought on the 10th of September, 1854. The battle was about over. They had driven the Russians over the river, and were pursuing them – when the Russians turned round and gave them a parting volley. Knight was struck in the breast by a bullet and fell, and at night when the Surgeons went round they found him, and seeing that the bullet had entered his chest – said “Well my poor fellow, you have not many hours for this world – here is some lint to staunch your wound, and a little brandy to comfort you. We can do no more for you, but must go and attend to those that we can be of use to”.

‘The following morning on the Surgeons going round again they found him still alive, attended to his wound, and found that the bullet had passed through his body (through one lung) and through the blade bone, and completely through his knapsack, and had carried a piece of his shirt front through his body and had left it in his knapsack. He was sent to the Hospital at Scutari, recovered, and in due course got his discharge and was invalided home. He got quite well and offered himself again for the Militia, was passed by the Doctor, and became a very useful man to us, and we made him a Sergeant. I can absolutely vouch for the truth of this statement for I have seen the scar on his chest where the bullet entered, and also the one in his back where it came out. After serving for the time for which he enlisted in the Militia he worked as a farm labourer and was alive until a very few years ago.’

The soldier injured at the Battle of Alma was almost certainly James Knight. He was baptised at Burley on 26th March 1837, the son of William and Elizabeth Knight. He was buried at Burley 26th September 1896, aged 59 years.

Florence Nightingale arrived at the army hospital at Scutari in November 1854. With determination and patience she made much needed changes there. She brought comfort and care to the virtually abandoned men, becoming a true ‘ministering angel’. Her arrival at Scutari was just over a month after the Battle of Alma and James Knight was probably one of her patients.



## An Extraordinary Event

The following account of an extraordinary event, which took place in the summer of 1880, was recorded by the Rev Benjamin Barratt, Vicar of Hambleton 1879-85, in *Leicestershire and Rutland Notes and Queries* (I, 298-9):

‘I once witnessed an appearance which I should hesitate to believe had it been told me by anyone I thought at all accustomed to draw the long bow. It occurred in winter about ten years ago at about half-past six in the evening, at the place where you turn off the Stamford Road for Hambleton, where I then lived. At that time I used very often to drive down to Oakham in the evening to bring up my son from school. Generally speaking, we used to meet the Exton postman (who drove a cart) before we turned off the Stamford Road for Hambleton.

‘One night, I and my son will remember as long as we live, for we both saw it, the most extraordinary thing we are ever likely to see. Just as we were in the very act of crossing the road to take the turn to Hambleton, to our horror we saw the Exton postman in his trap close upon us, and as we were already well into the middle of the road, nothing I thought could avert a collision. However, I instantly pulled my left hand rein to try to regain in some measure my proper side of the road, and allow the trap to pass. But lo, in almost less time than I could take to give a sudden pull at my rein, man, cart, horse and all had utterly vanished, and the road was free for us to take



*The location of the supernatural appearance on the Oakham to Stamford road, added to Letts' map of 1883*

*Hambleton Hall in 2006 (RO)*



**The Rev Benjamin Barratt referred to Hambleton Hall in his account of the mirage and he recorded the following information about it in the parish register:**

'The New Hall called Hambleton House was begun to be built in June 1880. Owner Walter Gore Marshall Esquire. Architect Mr Lee, London. Contractor Messrs Rudd, Grantham. Mr Marshall was High Sheriff for the County of Rutland in the year 1880.' The Hall is now a well known restaurant and hotel.

the turn for Hambleton without let or hindrance. We could both have sworn that it was the Exton postman and his horse and cart that we saw so close upon us, for we generally met him. We could not understand at the moment how he and his horse and trap could have come upon us so quietly, and therefore so suddenly. But it was no man, horse and trap that we saw, as the whole thing no sooner appeared than it suddenly disappeared again. We had scarcely turned the corner into the Hambleton road than we heard the Exton postman's trap coming along the road some two or three hundred yards off. I and my son concluded that it must have been a mirage, for we both saw man horse and cart close upon us as distinctly as ever we saw anything in our lives, and the impression it made

upon me remains most vividly printed on my mind at the present moment.

'About that time, it may have been some months earlier or later, but it was about the time Mr. Marshall's house at Hambleton was being built, some workmen going to their work at Hambleton told me that they saw what they described as two suns.

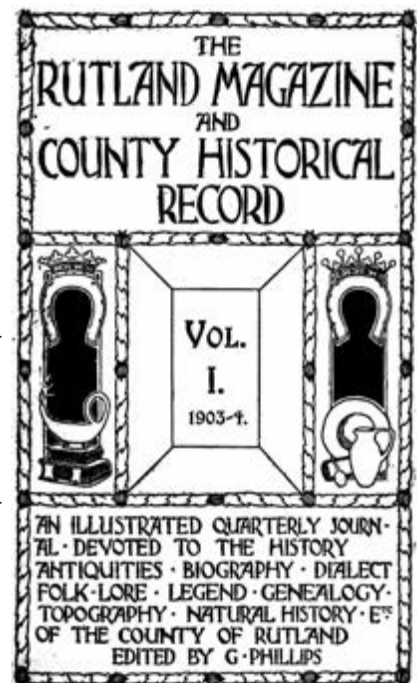
'What I and my son saw, which I have accurately described may appear very extraordinary, but we can both vouch for its being a fact.'

## Ghost with Vigorous Knuckles

The *Rutland Magazine* (I, 128) provides an extraordinary account of a Rutland ghost. Much of the information was provided by Mr Vernon Bryan Crowther-Beynon FSA, who lived at Edith Weston 1895-1912. He took a keen interest in archaeology and local history and was a frequent contributor to the *Rutland Magazine*:

'Edith Weston . . . in December, 1896, boasted a genuine ghost, a most active ghost, possessing vigorous knuckles, which it utilized upon the doors, floors, and cupboards of the estate bailiff's house. Mr. Crowther-Beynon, who most kindly provided me with full particulars of case, himself heard the knockings in a manner calculated to remove all suspicion of trickery from the most sceptical mind. The knockings lasted from a Friday night to the following Wednesday, and consisted of four separate knocks in rhythmic succession. At first the knocks were loud enough to be heard at the other end of the street a distance of about a hundred yards, and were of such violence that the family feared the woodwork of the door would be shattered; nevertheless, not a mark or scratch could be observed. Trickery it obviously was not. One day Mr. G., the estate bailiff, and H., the keeper, were standing

*Title page of  
the first  
volume of  
the Rutland  
Magazine*



one inside and the other just outside a room in the house, so that H. obtained a full view of one side of the door, while Mr. G. had a full view of the other. The knocks occurred on the door while they were standing in this position. On another occasion the keeper was examining the cellar to see if there was anything to account for the sounds. He found it empty, except for a few potatoes. He came out, locked the door, and was hanging up the key on the outside, when knocks sounded on the other side of the door with such force and noise that he opened it again, expecting to find the wood splintered. Not a mark was visible. Every sort of suggestion was offered to account for this extraordinary phenomenon, but the affair remains a mystery to this day.'

## Horn Fair

In the *Rutland Magazine* (IV, 61-2) there is an article reporting the re-appearance in Rutland of a curious custom known as Horn Fair. It was revived at Edith Weston in 1896, and was described by V B Crowther-Beynon as follows:

'A "Horn Fair" or "Tin-panning" represents the public expression by the villagers of their sense of outraged propriety and decency when some of their fellows have been guilty of a flagrant breach of morality. It takes the form of a series of nocturnal processions round the village with "rough music" produced by means of all kinds of whistles, horns, mouth-organs and trumpets, as well as of "instruments of percussion" in the shape of tin pans, tea-trays and the like. It would appear that the orthodox method in vogue here is to conduct this serenade for three successive nights, finally winding up with the public burning of an effigy of the culprit. In the present instance this closing part of the performance was omitted owing to



*A tranquil scene  
at Edith Weston in  
1906 (Hart)*



the regrettable interference of an over-zealous member of the County police. I find on inquiry that the last occasion when a “Horn Fair” was carried out in this village was some twenty-five years ago, and that the older inhabitants can recall two or three previous occurrences of a similar kind before that.’

He added:

‘However much we may deplore the circumstances which occasioned its revival, we may still admit a feeling of satisfaction in the knowledge that our modern civilisation and progress have not entirely swept away all these old village practices, while we may congratulate the community on the fact that public sentiment – outwardly at any rate – has taken its stand on the side of order and virtue even in these days of laxity . . . This institution, under various names, is, of course, well known and widely distributed over the country, and forms, it must be admitted, a wholesome and useful object lesson to successive generations, as showing that such misdeeds cannot be committed without incurring the odium of respectable citizens. I am glad, for the credit of Edith Weston and the county of Rutland, to record that both the erring parties in this case were persons who have been imported from outside the county in comparatively recent years, and are not members of our local stock.’

## A ‘Remarkable Meteor’

Thomas Barker, Squire of Lyndon Hall (1759-1809), was well known for his writings and meteorological observations. His journals include many fascinating references to country life at that time. He communicated the following account of a ‘remarkable meteor’ he had seen in Rutland. The paper was published in the *Philosophical Transactions* of the Royal Society and is reproduced in *The Weather Journals of a Rutland Squire* edited by John Kington: ‘SEPT. 15. 1749. a remarkable Meteor was seen in Rutland, which I suspect to have been of the same kind as Spouts at Sea . . .

‘It was a calm, warm, and cloudy Day, with some Gleams and Showers; the Barometer low and falling, and the Wind South, and small. The Spout came between 5 and 6 in the Evening; at 8 came a Thunder-Shower, and Storm of Wind, which did Mischief in some Places; and then it cleared up with a brisk N.W. Wind.

‘The earliest Account I have was from *Seaton*. A great Smoke rose over or near *Gretton*, in *Northamptonshire*, with the Likeness of Fire, either one single Flash, as the Miller said, or several bright Arrows darting down to the Ground, and repeated for some Time, as others say. Yet some who saw it, did not think there was really any Fire in it, but that the bright Breaks in a black Cloud looked like it. However, the Whirling, Breaks, Roar, and Smoke, frightened both Man and Beast. Coming down the Hill, it took up Water from the River *Welland*, and passing over *Seaton* Field, carried away several Shocks of Stubble; and crossing over *Glaiston*, and *Morcot* Lordships, at *Pilton* Town’s End tore off two Branches, and carried one of them a good way. In a Hedge-row in the Meadow, at



*The course of the tornado from Seaton to Hambleton in 1749 shown on Robins' map of 1818*



Right Angles to the Spout's Course, stood an Oak and an Ash 15 Yards asunder; the Oak a young sound one, 16 Inches thick, it split two Yards down, and one Half fell to the Ground, but was not quite parted from the other; the Ash, about 8 Inches thick, was torn off in the Middle, and carried 10 or 12 Yards. Between and on each Side of these Trees were other smaller ones, which were not hurt: I heard of no Harm it did after, but breaking and scattering a few Boughs. I saw it pass from *Pilton* over *Lyndon* Lordship, like a black smoky Cloud, with bright Breaks; an odd whirling Motion, and a roaring Noise, like a distant Wind, or a great Flock of Sheep galloping along on hard Ground; it was divided into two Parts all the Way it went, and tho' there was no Wind, moved apace from S. by W. to N. by E. As it went by a Quarter of a Mile East from me, I saw some Straws fall from it, and a Part, like an inverted Cone of Rain, reached down to the Ground. Some who were milking, said it came all round them like a thick Mist, whirling and parting, and, when that was past, a strong Wind for a very little while, though it was calm both before and after. It then passed off between *Edithweston* and *Hambleton*, but how much further I do not know.' *Lyndon Hall in 1910 (Hart)*