

Dotton History Society Newsletter

Number 13 Spring 1992

In the evening in the

PARISH HALL

commencing at 8.0 p.m. there will be a

GALA DANCE

The GRAND DRAW will take place at 10 p.m.
YOU MAY WIN A BICYCLE OR ANOTHER GOOD PRIZE

LES DENNIS & HIS BAND are generously giving their Service

DANCE 2/- - - - Tickets - - - DRAW 1/-

REFRESHMENTS WILL BE PROVIDED

Tickets for both Dance and Draw can be obtained from

Mrs. CARTWRIGHT 36, Bury Hill, Mr. L. DENNIS 19, Biggleswade Road
Mrs. HUTCHINSON 2, Horn Lane, Mr. P. HUTCHINSON 29, Royston Street
Mrs. HEKEFORD 'White House' Blackbird St. Mr. LENTON 35 Horstow Street,
Mr. W. WEST 30 King Street

— God Save The Queen —

To the Parishioners.

October, 1952.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The representative Committee of the Parish have decided to fittingly celebrate the Queen's Coronation, and have arranged the following programme for the day:

A United Service in the Parish Church.

Carnival and Procession.

Children's Sports and free Buffet.

Old People's Tea.

Dancing on the Market Square.

In order to proceed with this programme the Committee is making an early appeal for funds, and a collector will call upon you in the near future for your contribution.

We solicit your co-operation and generous financial support to enable us to carry out this programme and leave us with a substantial balance which could be used for something of a permanent nature for the general benefit of all parishioners.

On behalf of the Committee,

P. HUTCHINSON, Chairman.

J. T. H. JENNINGS, Secretary.

February 14th 1945 remembered.

Over the years requests for family history details have been received from many people, not only living in our own country, but from Canada, America, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. It has always been most rewarding to correspond with, and to meet, people with Potton connections. Last year we were faced with a different problem.

Jack Swayn, writing from Caloundra, Queensland, to Dennis Sale, Clerk to Biggleswade Town Council, stated that as he and his son Lex were coming to England in October, they would like to visit the area. His brother-in-law, Flight Sergeant C.W.Saunders, R.A.A.F., whilst serving with the R.A.F. in Stirling bombers at Tempsford, was killed in an accident over Potton on February 14th 1945. A request was made for details of the former air base and whether anyone remembered the accident. He continued: 'I was advised by a chance meeting with an Englishman here in Caloundra that as Potton was such a small place, a letter to Biggleswade may hold more hope'. A copy of this letter was sent to me and to Jack Hutchinson. With such a challenge, detective work began immediately!

Our own archives produced a newspaper article on Tempsford which included information on the former airfield and the annual reunion. It mentioned that John Button, Estate Manager of Tempsford Airfield Farm, kept a collection of memorabilia. A telephone call to him produced an offer of a viewing when our visitors arrived, Mr.S.Tomlin of Bedford was also contacted via the reunion organiser, Squadron Leader A,Firth. He offered to come to Tempsford to meet our visitors.

A newspaper article in our Scrapbook of 1987 told of the visit to Deepdale of members of the 'Warplane

Wreck Investigation Group'. They had hoped to trace the engine from the Stirling MK4 which had crashed at 2.15pm on February 14th 1945, killing all seven men on board after a tragic mistake by an American fighter pilot. As the bomber was returning to land at Tempsford, the American carried out a mock attack in his P51 Mustang, misjudged the distance, and cut the tail off the Stirling. The American plane crashed at Sandy, the pilot having bailed out. At the time the event was shrouded in secrecy due to special wartime operations in connection with the French Resistance. This information had been obtained from records in the Imperial War Museum. As this date matched that given by our enquirers, details were now available.

An article in the Beds Magazine (Vol.12 No.95) produced more information of the wartime activities at Tempsford, together with an aerial photograph of the runways. Details were sent to Australia and gratefully acknowledged.

After giving a talk to members of the W.I. in Everton Village Hall, Jack Hutchinson noticed a new plaque which had been presented by the Czech Freedom Fighters, 138 Squadron. In the resulting conversation about the visitors expected the next day, it was suggested that Les Dibdin, living in Everton, be contacted, as he had served on the base during the war.

When Jack and Lex arrived on the afternoon of October 9th plans were quickly formed. That evening we had a brief view of the former base, followed by a fascinating talk by Les Dibdin in Everton Village Hall. He brought along a collection of photographs which helped us to visualise the wartime scene.

The next morning Norman Parry joined Jack and myself on our visit to the airfield. John Button and Stan Tomlin talked about the photographs, maps and documents collected over the years. Our Australians were amazed to find that a man known to them, and living in Caloundra, had attended the recent reunion on September 28th. They had not realised that he had been the officer in charge at the funeral of the four Australian crew members at Cambridge cemetery.

We then drove around the area, visiting the barn at Gibraltar Farm which had been restored as a memorial to the many who had flown from this wartime airfield on their dangerous missions. Wreaths had been left by those attending the reunion. To have Stan and Les with us, who so ably described their wartime activities, was a great honour. A visit to Tempsford Church followed as the reunion service had taken place there.

Some years ago a newspaper article referred to a book being written by Ft.Lt.Montgomery, a veteran of 138 Squadron. Jack Hutchinson tried to obtain a copy but although the National Index was consulted, no reference could be found. On making enquiries on our visit to Tempsford, we learnt that the information contained in the book was still confidential and publication had been refused.

Chris Hall from the Biggleswade Chronicle interviewed Jack and Lex the next day and then we went to Deepdale so that photographs could be taken near the mast where the plane had crashed.

On Saturday Frank Brookman was able to meet our visitors and record his memories of the crash. He had seen the planes enter the clouds together followed by the terrifying sound of the collision. Many people had confused the crash we were researching with the one

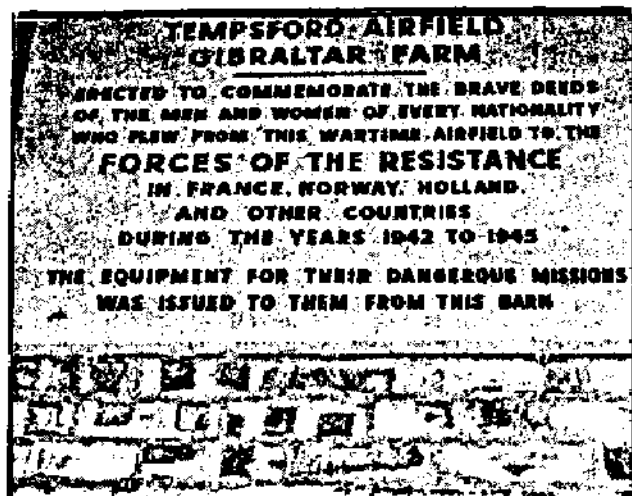
that had taken place the previous year so to talk to an eye witness was most helpful. Jack and Lex then went to Cambridge Cemetery to lay a wreath on the grave of Bill Saunders.

On returning home our visitors were delighted to receive a letter from Cyril Goldsmith. He had read the Chronicle article and wrote to say that he was a boy in Potton at the time of the October crash and since living in Cambridge had visited the grave of the pilot on the anniversary of his death. He would now visit the graves of the Australians. Such a kind and thoughtful action was much appreciated and merits praise.

Several letters have now passed between us. Contacts are being made with relations of the crew. An article is being prepared by Lex for the 'Returned Servicemen League Newsletter'. Copies of photographs have now been received from Australia including those of two crew members, Bill Saunders and George Wiggins. Special pages can now be prepared for inclusion in our photographic folder, World War II.

Everyone we contacted was most helpful and willing to give freely of their time which resulted in a memorable and rewarding experience for those involved.

Patricia R.Yates.



A Dangerous Nuisance

Our recent talk on the life and times of Dan Albone recalled an era when man was finding new ways of using the wheel. However, there were some who did not approve. The following extract was taken from a local newspaper of May 1875.

"A great nuisance is now rampant without let or hindrance in Potton. From 5 o'clock until 10pm the streets are given up to the rule of men and boys riding bicycles. Some have only reached the incipient stages. Others who are able to propel themselves for short distances without assistance present a sight difficult to see in any circumstances. With extraordinary grimaces and contortions they elevate the shoulders until they are level with the head and bend the knees to angles never intended by nature to be reached by any animals except monkeys, and in this position they disport themselves with great danger to all foot passengers and horses. Some certainly ride with ease but they are as dangerous as those less proficient as they "urge their mad career" at such a force that they cannot stop exactly where they please... and in the narrow streets and shop corners it is difficult to get out of their way... We have no desire to curtail the enjoyment of any class and would not object to the bicycle movement were it only fraught with danger for those practicing it. But when it becomes such a nuisance that ladies and timid people are afraid to pass the streets it is time something was done."

If only that writer could stand in Potton today and see cars and lorries roaring through those narrow streets. Their only saving grace is that you can at least hear them coming.

Mary Leigh

Childhood Memories.

No.1.

I was born in Potton and had a very happy childhood which can be summed up in this text which my mother often quoted to us: 'Christ is the head of this household, an unseen guest at every meal and a silent listener at every conversation'. There were two boys and two girls in my family.

My father worked in Miss Richardson's bakery shop in the Market Square. He was also the caretaker at the Conservative Club. In 1926 he was appointed Parish Clerk. The Clerk was really the servant of the Vicar. He dealt with Baptisms, the calling of Banns and the date of Weddings. No-one, unless they were very important, was allowed to marry in Lent. The Vicar would not have bridesmaids in Church unless their heads were covered. The Rev. Bagshaw was very strict. My father had a book of rules which he had to follow.

When anyone died he had to toll the bell. He got 6d (2½p) for half an hours work. It was the smallest bell for a child, and that was one stroke. For a woman it was the next bell and that was two strokes. For a man it was three strokes on the next bell. On the day of a funeral Dad and the Vicar met the coffin at the church gate. In the early days a hand hearse was used. After the service Dad walked in front all the way to the cemetery. Men stopped and took off their hats when a funeral passed by.

Dad rang out the old year, and after the Town Clock had struck twelve he would ring in the New Year. Sherry and mincepies were then served in the Vicarage.

Dad was a very good ringer and could manage three bells at a time; one in his hand, one with his elbow and one with his foot. At Harvest Time we could sit in the vestry but we had to behave ourselves and not get off

our seats. We thought our Dad was the 'Cat's Whiskers' when he called the changes - 'All Start Up', 'Two Trebles Gone'. If the ringers got in a muddle he would say 'Rounds Next Time'. It was an honour to ring the bells.

Printed on large boards in the Vestry were details of the Potton Charities. My oldest brother was apprenticed to the ironmonger, Tysoe, and my younger brother to Fennemore the painter. They were given 2s6d (12½p) each week. Apprentices were bound for several years. Gifts of coal were given to poor people.

I went to the meeting of the Girls Friendly Society each week. We met in the Parish Hall at Brook End. We took our own sewing and knitting. During the social half hour we danced or played games. Sometimes special services were held in St. Albans Abbey and we travelled there in Mr. Bartle's bus.

I also belonged to the Band of Hope and the Torch bearers Missionary Group. Both met monthly. Dad attended a weekly Bible Class.

A dancing class known as the '6 penny hop' was held in the Assembly Rooms behind the Rose and Crown. It was organised by Madge Hibbs and Doris Campling. Jimmy Yorke from Sandy played the piano. The last dance was always the Lancers and the boys were told not to lift the girls off their feet, but they didn't listen! People came from nearby villages. We all knew each other and it was good natured fun.

Connie Holben.

Transcribed from taped conversations with Patricia Yates, 1984, and Judith Hunt, 1988.

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* **NEW MEMBERS WANTED... CAN YOU HELP?** *
* *
* We need more members to help support our *
* expanding activities. The society offers:- *
* *
* 1. Free entry to monthly meetings *
* *
* 2. Free copy of Newsletter *
* *
* 3. Access to Society Archives in our *
* own research rooms. *
* *
* Please help us by letting others know about *
* our excellent value for money. Membership *
* rates are £7 Joint, £4 Full & £1.50 Senior *
* *
* We would like to involve people of all ages *
* in our work. If you have any suggestions for *
* expanding our membership please let us know. *
* *

Are you any good at pen and ink drawings?
My parish project map is progressing and I
have lots of ideas?
If you would like to help please contact me.
Telephone : Potton 260644

Boo Matthews

According to my parents I started Sunday School at the Potton Congregational Chapel in 1930. Although I have no recollection of the beginning of my Sunday School days, I remember clearly four special events.

Prize Giving day was held in January. We all met in the Central Hall attached to the Chapel. Trestle tables were laden with sandwiches, jellies and cakes. Mr. Barringer, the Superintendent, would hide pennies around the room. No child ever went home without finding one. An impromptu concert was followed by the Prize Giving. Children were given a Bible, a hymn book or a suitable story book by a special visitor. Those who had put in a full attendance won first prize. We applauded each child but by the time the third prizes were awarded many children were too busy looking at their own prizes to clap. Before going home each child received an orange.

The Sunday School Anniversary took place in June. New hymns had been learnt which included solos and duets. Poems were included in the programme. The girls looked forward to this event as we all had a new hat and dress which we did not wear until the afternoon service. The children were supported by their families and friends. A story was told by the Minister then children and adults joined in the final hymn. Whether it was excitement of wearing a new dress or nerves at having to recite, Sunday dinner on Anniversary day was not enjoyed. Sunday tea was another matter!

For our Sunday School outing we were taken on Mr. Bartle's buses to either Wicksteed Park or the seaside. We had great fun at the park as there was much to do - swings, slides, a water-shute, rowing on the lake or riding on the miniature railway which took us round the lake and through a tunnel. Tea was provided in a large building near the rose garden. If the day was to be

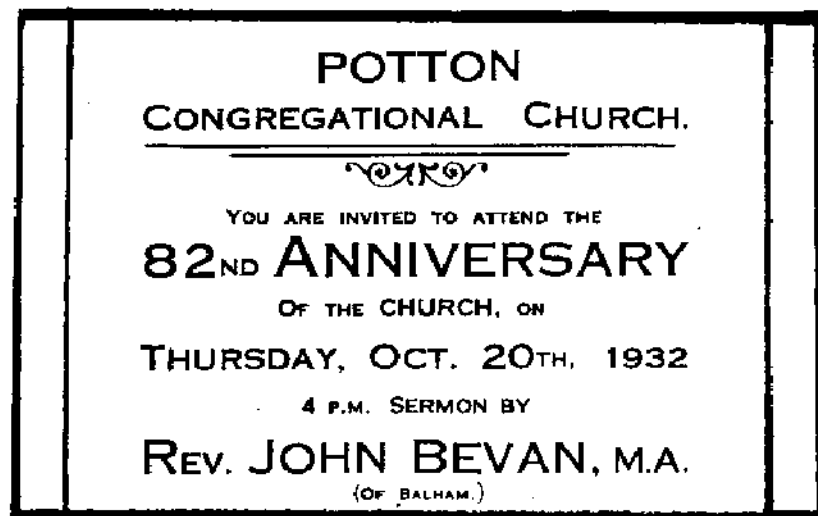
spent at the seaside, east coast resorts were chosen. For many children it was the only time they saw the sea as few fathers had paid holidays before the war.

Finally the October Concert was held to raise money. Two iron cylinder stoves heated the room. The evening performance included everyone from the primary class to the teachers. Nursery Rhymes were always popular, costumes being made out of crepe paper. I remember being Bo-Peep, wearing my blue bridesmaids dress and holding a crook. The oldest scholars contributed choruses, action songs and recitations. 'Ten Little Nigger Boys' was a favourite, performed with blackened faces! If any child had an individual talent such as piano playing, tap or ballet dancing, this would be included. The teachers' sketch was the grand finale. This was a special night looked forward by the people of Potton as well as Chapel folk.

I shall always remember with gratitude the Christian teaching of my Sunday School days.

Audrey Woodman.

Transcribed from a tape presented to the Society in 1983.



Emilie Gladys Lind Smith - 1888 - 1991.

An historic event took place in Potton on December 12th 1991 when the ashes of Miss Smith were interned in the last grave space in the Churchyard. The following tribute was given by Eric Jakes, Church Warden, in the memorial service before the committal:

'We meet here today to give thanks for the life of Emilie Gladys Lind Smith, known to many of us as Miss Queenie. It is fitting that this service of thanksgiving should be here in St. Mary's where Miss Smith worshipped with other members of her family for so many years of her life.

My memories of the Smith family only cover part of Miss Smith's long life, but I, together with others in church today, will recall coming to Sunday School in the small room above the church porch, to be taught by Miss Queenie and her sister, Miss Grace. We will also recall seeing the family at divine worship, sitting in their pews in the North Transept, since removed to form the present Lady Chapel.

The family over the years were generous benefactors to the church. Miss Queenie's eldest sister, Miss May, made a generous bequest to the incumbent's stipend for which the Sanctuary Lamp is a permanent reminder. The Church Banner to celebrate V.E. day was given by Miss Queenie and Miss Grace.

The work of the Boys Brigade was supported by Miss Smith, who, together with her sister Grace, would invite the local company each year to hold a meeting in the manor grounds, followed by refreshments in the Manor.

After the family left Potton in 1938, first to reside in Sandy, then Stansted and finally at Saffron Walden, regular visits to Potton continued. Miss Queenie and Miss Grace would call on their old retainers and other friends and often visited this church and the vicarage.

Miss Queenie was a staunch supporter of the Conservative cause here in

Mid Bedfordshire, being a Vice President of the Potton Women's Branch and also a very active President of the Potton Young Conservatives Branch, travelling from Stansted to attend Annual Dinners and many other functions. Her annual invitation to join her at the Arts Theatre in Cambridge will be remembered by the many who attended and I am sure a number will recall that some of the shows that we saw would not have been her choice.

One of the great loves of Miss Queenie and Miss Grace was the breeding, training and racing of greyhounds, and their visits to the famous meeting of the Waterloo Cup, where, I understand, on one occasion, their dog, Golden Miller, was a winner. This interest Miss Smith retained throughout her long life.

Her later years were spent at her home in Saffron Walden, cared for so devotedly by her companions and friends. It was there, three years ago, that she celebrated her centenary, at which I was privileged to be present.

Now, after a long and full life, Miss Queenie has left this world, and we should give thanks joyfully this afternoon for a long life, a good life, a Christian life. Miss Queenie has now gone to a room in her father's house, prepared for her by her Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, to meet with the other members of her family and indeed to complete once again the family of William and Elena Smith. We say - 'Well done thou good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of the Lord. Amen'.

In the past, several generations of the Smith family owned land and property in Potton. According to the Trade Directory of 1890, brothers Henry and William Smith were the principal land owners. William and Elena Smith lived at Home Farm with their four daughters. In 1915 the 1870 house, known as Potton Manor, was purchased and became their new home. After the 1917 sale of the late Samuel Whitbread's Potton estate, William Smith became the new 'Lord of the Manor'. Elene Smith died in 1931, her husband two years later. Their daughters were the chief beneficiaries. In 1934 much of their land was sold to form the Land Settlement Association.

Although the family left Potton in 1938, they are remembered by many Pottonians.

In the past couple of decades many local history groups similar to ours have sprung up with varying degrees of success. These groups depend upon a sound base in their own community for survival and therefore have little stimulus to devote some of their energies to developing links with groups outside their own area. Yet increasingly we are coming into contact with other groups and becoming involved in the wider scene.

In June we will be the organisers of the fourth Mid-Bedfordshire Local History Conference which will involve your committee in a lot of extra work. How have these links been built up and how will they benefit the ordinary member of the society?

1. Previous Local History Conferences.

These were begun by Martin Lawrence of the Harlington Heritage Trust in 1989 with the aim of bringing together Local History Groups across the Mid-Bedfordshire region of the county to share ideas and experiences. Each group sent two or three delegates and were treated to a programme of short talks, a good lunch and a guided walk of Harlington.

The second conference was hosted by Biggleswade and continued with a similar format with Mrs Yates contributing a short talk on developing a Pictorial Archive.

Last year The Ampthill group organised the third conference at Flitwick in a pleasant Village Hall that allowed plenty of display space for society exhibitions. After a talk on Beds & Herts Churches and a guided tour of Historical Flitwick the afternoon session was given over to short talks from each society. I contributed a talk on Potton Market Square and the Census which stimulated several societies to ask me to give a full talk to them! During the day we were asked to be the organisers of the next conference.

2. The Fourth Mid-Beds Local History Conference

This will be held on Saturday June 27th. We hope to use the Church Hall and the Church itself as the main focus of the conference which will have the theme 'LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETIES DEVELOPMENT OR STAGNATION? The main aim of the day will be to share the concerns and problems of Local History organisers and to identify possible solutions to the challenge of maintaining and developing their activities.

Our county Archivist, Chris Pickford, will provide a Key note speech where he will review the current state of Local History and will identify the challenges that lie ahead. We then plan to split the conference into discussion groups to work on solutions to individual concerns. We will provide a town walk and a conference review as well as a buffet lunch.

Groups from Harlington, Biggleswade, Ampthill, Langford, Maypole Heritage, Roxton, Toddington, Beds Family History, Beds Historical Record Society and Luton Museum have indicated support for the conference which could involve up to 40 delegates.

We have expanded the activities of our society with the opening of the research rooms which involve an extra financial burden including paying the bills for items such as heating, lighting and insurance. The interest in our programme remains good but our actual membership level is falling from its peak of around 80. The theme for the conference was chosen with this problem in mind. Other groups face problems of a similar nature in their work. We hope that the conference will help us to work together to develop the involvement of more people in Local History work and thus prove a worthwhile investment of time and energy for this society.

Peter Ibbett

An extract from Houghton Regis parish papers, thought to be issued by the High Sheriff to all parish constables.

Instructions to Parish Constables

1616 the II off June To the Constables off.....
whiche nowe ayre and to the
reste succeeding heire after
in their playsses.

Theis articles to be enqwyred off and seirtyffeed from tyme
to tyme: especiallye syxe da ys beffore everye Assyzes
particulariye by the petie constables unto the cheefe
constables of the hondred off..... by a
commandment from the Judges.

1. In prymus, what felonies ben comnytted within your
parishe off what and ageinste whom: and what persute
hayve beine mayd for the fellons. And what to become
off theime.
2. Item, what escapes off fellones: Idle vagarond or
suspicious persons hayth bein suffered without
apprehenshyon and ponnishmente by the constables or
anny other peirson and in whose deffawte any suche
did ascape and whether your nyhte wattchinge be
dully kepte accordinge to the lawe.
3. Item, what ryetous outrageous or unlawfull assemblyes
tendinge to the breache off his majessties pease.
4. Item, what recusantes popishe or sectary that com not to
church, to hear devyn servise accordinge to the law by
whom harbored and how longe they beine recusantes.
5. Item, what extorshyon or appresshyon haythe beine
comnytted within your parishe by anny offycer whatsoever.
6. Item, what engrosseirs forestallers regrators and
badgers be within your parishe lysensed or not lysensed
and who they bee.
7. Item, what allowsseis or typplinge howsses be within
your parish lysensed or not lysensed and who they bee
and whether those lysensed do observe the orders to them
laytlye prescrbed yes or no and what ponnishmente hayth
ben don them unlyensed.

8. Item, what commun dronkeirdes or comun hawnters off alhowses be within your parishe.
9. Item, you shall satiffye iff anny within your parishe be admytted to the offese off a petie constable excepte shalbee subcidimen and off good undarstandinge.
10. Item, you shall seirtiffie all masters that shall reteyn any servantes owt off the generall pettie seisnens or geive brettyer waggels than is or shalbe ratted and seitt downe accordinge to the laws and non to reteyn any servantes but in the generall pettye sesheons except it be in caysse off neccessittie and the sayd reteinor to be mayd knowne unto the cheefe constable off the hondreth to be entered into theyr books: and whether your pettye sesshyons be kept att the tymes ackustomed yee or no.
11. Item, iff anny person shall goe abowgte anny new cottige or small tenemente and ley or provid tymber ston or clay for the building theyr off that you pressently geve notis there off to the next Justices.
12. Item, iff anny lorde or freeholders shall build anny new cottige or small tenemente not leyinge theire unto foore ackeirs off land accordinge to the law that you pressently geive nottis to the next Justyse of the peace that suche ordr may be tacken with the builders theiroff as is llaytlye ordeyred by authorittye.
13. Item, you shall enqwyer off all porviowrs and pollters whiche annye vytualles and seill the sayme a geane at a nonrezoble rayte.
14. Item, you shall enqwyer off dove howzase erecocted or mentayned by anny not beinge lord off the manor or peirson off the towne.

Feal not the due executioun off all theys articles from tyme to tyme as you and every off you will answer to the contrayrie at your peirells.

And theis articles see that you dow delever from tyme to tyme unto the next Constables succedinge your plasseis as you lykwyse answer to the contrayrie at your peirells.

N. Parry