

This is the Sixty-Third of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

REV. AUGUSTUS JESSOPP

Here I find myself going a little outside Swanton Morley and talking about the Rev. Augustus Jessopp, who was rector of Scarning from 1879 to 1911. I initially came across him when I found that he had published a story about Swanton Morley Water Mill in the Sept 1899 edition of a journal called *The Nineteenth Century*, which was a monthly literary magazine edited by the architect James Knowles. Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to find the original of this article, although I do have a copy of the story. Anyway, he wrote regular articles for the above journal on a wide range of humorous, erudite and historical topics. He has been described as being a fine example of the learned but somewhat eccentric country parson. I certainly found him to be a very interesting character, so I thought that I would tell you something about him and leave his story about the mill until my next article.

A brief life of Dr Augustus Jessopp

He was born at Cheshunt, Herts on 20 Dec 1823, and was educated at St John's College, Cambridge. He left with an ordinary degree to undertake the curacy of Papworth in Cambridgeshire and he resided there until he became headmaster of Helston Grammar School in Cornwall in 1854. Here he remained until he succeeded Dr Vincent as headmaster of Norwich School in 1859.

On 13 July 1859 the *Norwich Mercury* noted that "King Edward VI's School, Norwich has now been put upon an entirely new footing" and it stated that "The headmaster is now the Rev. Augustus Jessopp." He became rector of Scarning in 1879, aged 55, having spent all the previous twenty years as headmaster of Norwich School, during which time he transformed it from a struggling school of thirty pupils into a modern, highly-regarded public school."

Then, in 1902, he was made one of the Chaplains in Ordinary to King Edward VII. The term "in ordinary" indicates that he was a regular member of the Royal Household.

In its 21 Dec 1907 Edition, the *London Daily News* said "Congratulations are due today to one of our most delightful historical essayists, Dr Augustus Jessopp, who enters his 84th year. Like most liberal clergymen, he has paid the penalty for professing progressive opinions and has received no recognition beyond an honorary 'stall without fodder' at Norwich." I think that this strange expression is a little clerical joke meaning that he was a member of the Chapter at Norwich Cathedral which was the governing body of the cathedral, but he received no financial reward for his duties.

Incidentally, there has not been a chapter house, as such, at the cathedral for many years, and the Dean and Chapter now meet in a new 'Chapter Room' which was built in about 1957 on the site of an anchorite's cell.

Later, on 21 Dec 1911, the *London Daily News* wrote that “Dr Augustus Jessopp, parish priest and man of letters, one of the few persons still surviving who was associated intimately with a great era in English literature, entered his 88th year today. The aged doctor was up to a month or so ago incumbent of the little village of Scarning. Old age has not dealt unkindly with him, but increasing infirmity has led to his resignation of the living, and he is now leading a life of retirement in a pleasant little house in the Chantry, Norwich.” The *London Daily News* continued: “When I called, I found the doctor lamenting the loss of a great many treasured volumes which were recently disposed of in the auction rooms.”

Augustus Jessopp died, aged 90, on 12 February 1914 at a Nursing Home in Surrey, and an obituary to him appeared in the 13 February 1914 Edition of *The Times*.

There is a memorial to him in Scarning Churchyard and this was rededicated by Canon Sally Theakston on 30 May 2014, the centenary of his death. There is a short video of the re-dedication ceremony available on line.

The Arcadian Club

I was quite surprised to find that there is an ‘Arcadian Club’ whose function it is to study the life and work of the Rev. Augustus Jessopp. The name comes from the fact that he wrote a book ‘Arcady for better or worse’ which is about agricultural life in Norfolk. Now Arcady was the idyllic country where people lived as shepherds and shepherdesses and the sun shone all day. For Jessopp, Norfolk was his Arcady!

The Arcadian Club was formed in 1996. It is now part of the Dereham Antiquarian Society, which manages Bishop Bonner’s Cottage Museum, and the Club’s newsletters can be found on the Society’s website. Be warned, however, that if you try look up the Arcadian Club directly on the internet you may well end up with details of a night club in Birmingham!

His literary connections

He was very active in the literary world, and he was particularly friendly with the novelist and poet George Meredith (who is probably best known these days for having written the poem “To a lark ascending”). Two other poets that he knew well were Robert Browning and Alfred Lord Tennyson.

The Gidlow family

I hope to tell you, in my next article, about the article that Jessopp published in *The Nineteenth Century* about a family called Gidlow, who lived in Swanton Morley Watermill.