

CONCERNING AN 18TH CENTURY VILLAGE
FIRE AND A BUCKS SPA

Among the MSS at Claydon House there is a correspondence between Ralph Verney, Viscount Fermanagh (afterwards 1st Earl Verney) and his Steward, John Millward, concerning a disastrous fire in the Buckinghamshire Village of Marsh Gibbon.

Lord Fermanagh, whose amiable face and broad expanse of scarlet brocaded waistcoat shine out of his portrait at Claydon, was at this time Member for Wendover, and lived a good deal in his house at Chelsea, while his steward sent him constant reports of Claydon and of County affairs, and a weekly basket of game and pigeons, eels from the pond, and butter from the home farm.

The letters tell their own story of the village fire, and incidentally of the sufferings of a good lady under various physicians.

Lord Fermanagh writes to inquire about "a most dreadful fire at Marsh w^{ch} I hope is not so bad as it reported I am y^r loving friend

F."

To the Right Hon^{ble} the Lord Visct. Fermanagh of
Little Chelsea neare London.

June ye 11th 1740

My Lord Last Friday broke out between 4 & 5 in the afternoon, a terable fire at Marsh Gibbon w^{ch} burn down 30 Houses or better. The loss they compute at £10,000. There was several great farmers w^{ch} lost a great deal of wheat & beans. The fire began at Mr. Masson's brew House, the maid kept a large fire w^{ch} got the sutt on fire w^{ch}. flew out of that chimney upon a barn & set that on fire, it is that part of the town next Bicester. I heard that Bicester people gathered up the next day 40 odd pounds & carryed to the Sufferers. I heard Mr. Grenville¹ give thirty guineas, I heard that Mr. Lowndes was there the next day but did not hear what he give. . . Mr. Harper just called to see Mrs. Mary Chaloner & says that there was 36 dwellings burnt at Marsh, but I

Sopose in some Houses 2 or 3 Familys, he says the loss is reckoned at £10,000. Mr. Trotman at Bucknell has sent em £40, Bicester £43 odd, Mr. Grenville £30, he has not heard what others have sent yet. The Woodward's Dog to-day kill'd a Hare by Chance in the wood, an old one w^{ch} is gone up with the basket.

I am y^r Lordship's most obedient & Faithful Servant. J. Millward."

From the same—Midsummer Day 1740.

My Lord

In my last I acquainted y^r Ldsp that I had seen Mr. Southam & that he had carried twenty guineas by Mr. Grenville's orders to the sufferers at Marsh & forgott to ask him who he paid the money to, but I am told mostly to Mr. Crook,² some to Mr. Guy,³ & they distribute it. These two men was utter enemies before this fire as their Manor was disputed about but since the fire, some sent their money to one and some to the other & they sent to each other to know how to distribute it & now they are very good friends.

I did hear as Mr. Lowndes⁴ give ten guineas, & since I hear five, there is no such thing as knowing the truth of these things. . . . I will not carry any money till I hear from y^r Ldsp again. It was a dreadful fire & they are near neighbours. East Claydon & Bottle give 6 or 7 pounds, Mr. Abell give two guineas, Middle Claydon 4 or 5 pounds. I was told the Rector give £4 & desired the Churchwardens to lay down £3 : 6 more for his Visitation dinner, w^{ch} made £7 6 Od. some of the head Tenants give £10 as T. Bailey for one, most of the people are willing to give what is very handsome to the Fire, Steeple Claydon did very handsome as I was told " The Rector of Middle Claydon was the Rev. William Butterfield, the last of the Butterfield dynasty who for a century in a direct line of descent had been Rectors of Middle Claydon from 1657 to 1759.

" Mrs. Chaloner continues much as she was, some-times better & sometimes worse & the Dr. is ill as he can't attend her, but in reading-over ye Advertise-ments in the Craftsman ⁵ last week, I see y^e Hippo

Drops was a famous medicine, & reading over the Excellencies of em to her seemed to fit her case, she has sent for a Bottle of 'em so that I are in hopes they will do more than Dr. Burrell has done & make a cure."

The Hippo Drops seem to have been disappointing, as a month later Mr. Millward reports: Mrs. Chaloner goes in Capt. Chaloner's Chaise to Oxford, to consult Dr. Frewin, but her son is not to go " into Oxford because ye small pox is very rife there & a very bad sort" "The Captain was very handsome, he did not let her pay a farthing but the Doctor's Fee. Dr. Frewin happened to be at home & prescribed for her. She told him how long she had been Ill with this lurking Fever, hee told her she had no occasion to have been Ill a quarter of y^e time if she had went to anybody as understood Phisick, he did not doubt but soon cure her. He has prescribed for her to Drink a quarter of a pint of Hogshaw Hill Spaw water in the morning after her Electuary & the same quantity in the afternoon. She must send for it every day w^{ch} would do full as well as the German Spaw, I've a Notion the Doct^r mistook & think it might be Hogston Spring ⁶ wch always was reckon'd a very good mineral water but the Doct^r told her it was within a mile of Dodershall & could not be above a mile & a half from Claydon if so it must be Hogshaw Hill."

[July 16]. " Mrs. Chaloner is in a poor way again, Dr. Frewin's Medicines has had but little Effect. She sent to the Doct^r last Sunday but he was not at home, Mrs. Frewin told the man as went that the Doct^r should answer by next post. They was Hogston Waters she should have tho' the Doct^r writ Hogshaw they was to be the same as old Mr. Butterfield drunk. I fancy she must go to Bath again for she is no better. She ebbs & flows much."

From the same June y^e 29th 1740.

My Lord, I writ to y^r Hon^r last Thursday & in the afternoon I went to Marsh to see the Ruins of the Fire, wch is a very shocking sight, & then went up to the Ale House where Mr. Crook does all the office Business & receives the money, The men let him

The son married Elizabeth Barker, who had inherited the Busby estate of Marsh Gibbon [See *Genealogical History of the Croke Family*, Vol. I., p.p. 680-688.] He was buried at Chilton, where so many of his ancestors, lie, and is commemorated by a slab which also records the burial of his son, another Alexander.

³MR. GUY

There is a mural monument in Marsh Gibbon Church to William Guy (1774), his wife, and two children.

⁴MR. LOWNDES

This is Richard Lowndes, M.P. for Bucks, 1742, and grandson of "Ways and Means Lowndes," Queen Anne's famous Secretary of State.

⁵THE CRAFTSMAN," a paper issued twice a week under the editorship of Caleb D'Anvers (Nicholas Amherst). It began 5th Dec., 1725, and was written by Lord Boling-broke, W. Pulteney, and others in opposition to Sir R. Walpole's measures. Being well and boldly written, it reached a circulation of 10,000 copies an issue; after-wards it declined, and ceased after the completion of 14 volumes.

⁶THE MEDICAL SPRING

One fears that Dr. Frewin blundered over Hogshaw Hill Spaw; there is a spring on the north side of the hill, facing North Marston; it is in a field called Chalscombe, beneath some large elder-bushes, and serves as a drinking-place for cattle. So far from being "within a mile of Doddershall," it is 2¹/₄ miles in a direct line from that fine old mansion., There is a vague tradition about its therapeutic qualities, but it is free from any chalybeate. On the other hand there is a very famous spring at Hoggston, about half-mile east of the church in a hilly field called High Havens. This spring is very remarkably impregnated with iron, and stains the hand red when held for a minute over the mouth of the pipe from which it issues. It flows first into a shallow concrete tank, about 6 feet long and 15 inches wide, surrounded with a wide concrete platform, to prevent the treading of cattle. It afterwards flows to another field lower down, and provides water for the animals pastured upon 80 acres. This spring has a wide reputation to this day, and those acquainted with it send for it from a considerable distance. In its more humble capacity of slaking the thirst of cattle it is valuable because its flow is uninterrupted throughout the year (it flowed even in the drought year of 1921), and it never freezes.