

The Memoir of Ernest Plowright.

In 1974 the Norfolk Women's Institute made a collection of oral histories of the older residents of their respective villages. Castle Rising was lucky enough to have several people with long memories who were able to describe village life in their childhood years more authentically than any historian can. Ernest Plowright was one of these. The ninth child in a family of fourteen, he was born in 1890 and lived in a small cottage in Low Road (number 18). His father was a bricklayer and had also been born in the village. Ernest and five of his siblings appear in the school photograph taken in about 1897



Ernest is second from the left on the middle row. His brother Walter, father of Jack Plowright who still lives in the village, is fourth from the left on the bottom row
Mrs Howse on the extreme right is the teacher and wife of the head-master Arthur Howse

He was interviewed by his niece Marjorie Smith who taped the conversation and from it wrote his memoir. In 2007 a copy of the tape was brought back to Castle Rising from Tasmania by Ernest's grandson, Steven Plowright. It is reproduced below almost word for word and it gives a vivid picture of life in the village around the turn of the century. The Plowright name has been associated with Castle Rising since at least 1745 when Susan Ploughwright married William Leeder of Dersingham. There are still Plowrights in the village today.

Schooling

I started school in 1892, the day I was three and left the day I was thirteen as all village children did. The Headmaster (Mr. Arthur Howse) taught the older children and his daughter (Miss Laura Howse) taught in the infant's room. The first thing we learned to do was to knit cuffs in red wool and sewed them together to go round our wrists for warmth in winter. After that of course we learned different lessons and eventually moved into the bigger school and that schoolmaster left and two sisters, Miss Morrisises came. One was the head teacher and the other takes the infants. I remember after they'd been there a few years having our photograph taken outside the school; half the school was on one. Some years after that of course, those teachers left and Miss Ashton came, she was the next teacher. We didn't pay to go to school, but my father had to pay when he went and my mother never did learn to read and write. She never did go to school.

The only thing we was allowed off for was when there was shooting from the Hall. We were allowed to go carrying cartridges for the gentlemen for three days. If Lord Farquhar's¹ guests paid us they always gave us a golden sovereign for three days, but if the man who was loading for him paid us, he only gave us ten bob, ten shillings. He kept the rest for himself I expect, but we don't know that.

There was a large pear tree in the playground in those days. They were small pears but we thoroughly enjoyed them, the youngsters thoroughly enjoyed them as they fell down early morning there in the playground. We had the cane sometimes; we weren't always good but we never played truant. Sometimes we had to take our dinner to school if my mother went anywhere. There were no school dinners then, not at all. The children from Knight's Farm, the mill, the sandpits and various places they brought their dinner every day and had it in the school. There was a big monk stove in the middle of each room and a fireplace at one end of the big room. It was never too hot in the winter

The Village.

At the back of the school was a path known as Spring Path with a notice board at the top saying 'No bridleway'. Half way down the path was a spring of water constantly running for many, many years. I've heard my father say that he used to

have to carry the water from there up into the village. After that the path carried on to what is known as Mill Road that took us to a mill that was always called the Paper Mill². Whether they ever made paper there I do not know, on the Babingley River it was. From there the river went on to another mill known as Top Mill, where they ground corn and that for everyone in the village up to not many years ago.

The Black Horse was built in 1890, while I was at school. A man by the name of Martin was the first landlord. This took the place of the old inn on the opposite side of the road, always known as the Old Black Horse. At the same time a bungalow was built opposite the gates of what was then the Hall and that was the Post Office until up to a few years ago.

In about 1900 water was laid on in the village, pumped from the Babingley from the Lower Mill to the reservoir at the back of the castle to supply the village with water. I think Lord Farquhar had a lot to do with it. There was a tap between each two or three houses close together. Before that most houses had a well, some with a chain and bucket and some with a pump.

There was a lane leading from the Low Road to the marshes called Marsh Lane and at the end of that on the common there was a brickyard where they used to make bricks. A horse used to pull a thing round that ground up the clay and a man would mould it and put the bricks in the kiln and bake it for the estate's use chiefly. It was eventually closed down because bricks got manufactured cheaper than they could make them. That is where the brickyard was, still known as the brickyard in my day. That's on the end of the Common where the cattle used to be shut up at night. The Day Common was open all day from six in the morning till five at night. Fifty-two head of stock were allowed on. Certain people in the village, cottagers, had what they called the right, not everybody, and an old chap in the village used to get two pence a head a week for looking after them. He used to go round Friday nights to collect the money himself. It didn't amount to much.

In our village there were two master carpenters. One was the undertaker as well and he was also the church verger and a special constable. Always a man in the village was made special constable although he never had no duties to perform, I don't think.

There was also a blacksmith and a blacksmith's shop. A man named Fenn was the blacksmith, Tom Fenn. He got a bit lazy in the finish and they turned him out of the village. He died two years ago in Woodlands³. Then another man by the name of Common came to the blacksmiths but by then horses were gradually fading away, the motor car was coming in. Tom Fenn had two boys and a girl. I went to school with one boy; he was born on the same day as I was. They used to take their horses to be shod and various other things were made. They'd light a fire round the side, put an iron wheel rim on to heat, and then drop it onto a big round plate with a hole in the middle for the hub. When the rim was right hot through they'd pick it up with tongs each side and drop it on the wheel. Then pour water on it and as it cooled that shrank and fit tight. Swells with the heat and tightened up when it was cooled. They used to do that a lot for the farm wagons and private carts too. Every body, most, a lot of people had a horse or a pony and cart, the fairly well off anyway.

We used to walk, but I had a bicycle that my brother George and me gave half a crown for when I was about eleven. It was one of those with, very thin tyres, about half an inch wide, and the brakes on the tyres. We used to learn to ride it at the top of the church hill and get on it and go down the hill. If you didn't turn the corner you go onto the green and fall off onto the grass. There were carrier's carts used to come through our village. There was two. One from Brancaster to Lynn and they'd bring things for you naturally enough. If you wanted to go to Lynn you would walk unless you walked to North Wootton Station and went by train.

I remember three old people in the village; I believe they all reached a hundred. One was named Tom Allen, another was Bob Clamp who lived next door to us and then there was Mr. Smith He used to sit in his yard when I was quite a boy. I can

remember him splitting hazel woods stems for brodgers⁴ for thatchers to stick in the corn stacks. They no longer thatched cottages then.

The estate people lived in the village of course, there were two carpenters, a bricklayer, a thatcher, four woodmen and a bailiff, who used to live in the house next to where grandma used to live, name of Turnbull in those days. They worked in the woods often in hot weather were really eaten up by the flies. It was terrible for them – I don't know how they stuck it. They used to cut willows down and they'd fell trees and had a portable engine on a cart with horses and a saw-bench and they would saw trees up as boards to use on the estate. The burr wood, they used to faggot up and tie with willow bands and deliver to the cottages at half a crown a load. The thicker wood was three shillings a load. We used to turn out on moonlight nights with a cross-cut saw and saw it up for firewood. A man from West Lynn used to pick coal up from the harbour at Lynn with a horse and cart and came round to Castle Rising every Thursday to deliver it. We had one hundredweight of coal a week and that used to be nine pence.

The Hall and Shooting Parties.

The Hall was opposite the church. I remember when General Sir Redvers Buller⁵ came, he married Howard's widow. The whole village turned out in welcome. If I remember rightly, the horses were taken off the carriage for the last part of the journey and he was pulled into the Hall. It was after the war, very soon after when he came there, early 1900s. Probably 1903, the war finishes in 1902 didn't it, the Boer War, that year or the next. I think he was the first Howard to own the estate, his widow anyway.⁶

I was playing cricket at Castle Rising, against Clenchwarton I believe, and a man come and sat on my table in the clubroom and had tea there and he was a parson's son from Terrington and he told me the history of Castle Rising. The Howards had a big law suit to get this estate, a big law suit to get it,⁷ this boy's grandfather, to get the whole estate and somebody else contested the will. They had to mortgage the estate and that's what kept them so poor all the time, that and death duties. This

boy's grandfather died⁸ and he had to pay death duties then it went on to his older son. He had only three years before he died in India, another lot of death duties. The estate consists of Castle Rising, nearly all of North Wootton and the majority of Roydon⁹.

Later the Hall was let by the Howards to Lord Farquhar as a shooting lodge. Sir Horace Farquhar, first he was, eventually he was made Lord Farquhar. Every year he entertained, I believe he entertained the Prince of Wales when King Edward VII was Prince of Wales. He definitely entertained him when he was King. He'd come over from Sandringham on a Monday and stay until Friday for three days of shooting. A special wing was built and added on to the hall for him.¹⁰ They'd shoot eighteen hundred or two thousand pheasants a day in the main shoots. There would be as many as fifty men as beaters and they would wear a special smock and a round hat with a red band round it and drive the pheasants to the guns. The guns got so hot they could hardly hold them. There would be two men, one loading and the other shooting. There was one old man who came beating from Grimston that King Edward always put his hand in his pocket for, to give him half a sovereign. Three men and two horses came out from the village with a marquee which they erected then a hot lunch would come from the Black Horse with footmen to serve. The ladies would often join them for lunch. There would always be a hot lunch for the loaders. Us boys and the beaters would all have half a pound of beef, half a loaf of bread and a quart of beer supplied by the landlord, for their lunch. We got three shillings, I think or half a crown for the day. That was a day shooting that was.

Farming and Family Life.

The farm labourers who worked with my father had a tied house and they very often stayed many years. On October 11th house changes were made. One man would move out with a wagon and horse for the furniture and another would move in to his cottage on the same day. They were rough times for farm labourers in

those days of course. In the 1880s farm labourers pay was ten shillings a week. If they didn't work they didn't get paid. If it was a wet day or a wet afternoon, they'd go to work and get wet through by dinnertime and then go home and if they did this they only got paid for the half-day. It was a struggle for large families to live. They couldn't buy clothes like they can today; most of the children's clothes had to be made by their mothers. My mother was never idle at night. She had a big sewing machine and if she wasn't doing that she was darning socks, and I never knew her idle at night, never.

We had to grow our own vegetables and that was the main part of our living. The baker used to come round three times a week from Lynn and the butcher twice a week. We used to keep pigs and always killed two pigs in the winter and cured them for ham and bacon. We took the hams to Lynn to be smoked and then they were hung up in the kitchen. Saturday night tea in the winter consisted of a huge tin of sliced potatoes and onions with a lump of fat bacon on top baked in the oven.

I remember as a lad I used to go gleaning in the fields with my brothers. We would pick up all the ears of wheat that had broken off and take them home in sacks. When the threshing people came to the farm to thresh the stacks, people in the village would take their sacks of corn and they'd thresh it for them. Then the man at the Top Mill would come and collect it and take the corn to grind it and bring it back as wholemeal flour. Then we used it for bread; we'd get two or three good sackfuls of flour, just depends on how many fields of wheat there was. There was a man at the back of the school, by the name of Nurse¹¹, who used to supply flour, pig meal, chicken corn and all that. He was a miller. He went around on Friday nights for orders and as a lad of about nine or ten; I used to go round with his daughter delivering it in the cart

. We all had to help in the garden and had to weed so many numbers of rows of onions before we were allowed out to play. We had to dig and everything. We had a big garden and we had to dig it all.

Then haymaking came along. Several people kept two or three cows and had a grass field or two for their own hay and we used to go along and help make it.

When we were busy they used to bring us what we called 'fourses'. Actually it was at tea time, four o'clock and they would bring new bread and cheese, lettuce and spring onions and they all went down very nice, I can assure you and beer for the men of course.

Then harvest came along. The farm people all went to the harvest and they'd set one or two extra men on. When I was fifteen I went to harvest and the older brother next to me, he went as well. We used to mow barley from five o'clock in the morning till seven at night, about a dozen men. Us two had to fall in behind the men. We had half an hour for breakfast, an hour for dinner and half an hour for fourses. These were the only breaks. Not everything was done by hand. They had two sail-reapers on the farm but there were no combine harvesters then, not till the turn of the century. I've been all day tying wheat and oats, using our own straw to make the bands with. You'd have to go round in rows as a cutter, cutting. Sail reapers cutting, they laid them in rows. The "Lord", that's the head man; he took charge of everything. He'd take the longest line on the outside of the field and us boys would be inside on the shortest. The next time we'd take the longest. When we came to set up the shocks¹² we had to shock our own work. If we didn't tie it right the first time we had to do it again. Nobody helped you out. If you stopped to run a rabbit you still had a bit of mowing to do. I remember we had Harvest Suppers when I was a boy but that died out when the first war came along. It killed a lot of things.

There was a shed on the farm where we kept a lot of sheep. Spring of the year people used to come to shear wool off them in the barn. Do the fleeces up, pack them up and send them to Lynn. When the lambs arrived in early springtime they used to have their tails cut off and we had a heated iron and cut their tails off and that stopped the blood, stopped them bleeding. The cottagers and everyone was always glad to get lamb's tails – they were very tasty. It took a lot of trouble to get all the wool off. We used to lay them on a damp floor, put them in salt water, clean them and make a 'lamb's tail pie'. That used to be marvellous – it would stand alone that would!

We didn't go fishing but we used to go down to the Babingley River and bathe, Sunday mornings in the summertime, right across the marshes. We had a cricket team. The Rev. Thursby was the vicar and he was a good cricketer. Only village people in the team – not like now. North and South Wootton and Castle Rising people was the only people allowed to play. We played in the Sandringham District League. Every year there was a fair on May 3rd in the Black Horse yard but that stopped in 1914. On Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897 there was a dinner in Faile's Barn¹³ for the entire village, with spoils afterwards, and the same for George V's Coronation.

¹ Lord (Horace) Farquhar was a friend of King Edward VII and Master of the Royal Household. He rented the Hall at Castle Rising as a shooting lodge for many years around the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth century.

² In fact it was the upper mill which had been the paper mill at one time.

³ 'Woodlands' was an old people's home in North Wootton.

⁴ Brodgers is a term used by Ernest's niece Marjorie Smith and refers to the hazel pegs used to secure corn stacks, The hairpin of the peg was formed by giving a half turn and a twist, whereby the hazel is doubled without breaking the fibres.

⁵ Gen. Redvers Buller married Audrey Howard, the widow of Greville Theophilus Howard. He was a national hero of the Boer Wars.

⁶ Greville Theophilus Howard was the first of the present branch of the Howard family to own the estate.

⁷ After the death of Mary Howard, in 1877 there were no direct heirs to her various estates. The Castle Rising estate went to Greville Theophilus Howard, a distant relative. We have no information about any dispute.

⁸ 'This boy' refers to Henry Redvers Greville Howard, Greville Theophilus Howard's grandson. The estate had passed to Greville's eldest son, Henry who died of malaria in Calcutta (aged 22), then to his brother, Charles Alfred. The 'boy' Henry was Charles' son.

⁹ As it had for more than 250 years.

¹⁰ This is not correct but there was a separate building for him erected in the garden of the Hall.

¹¹ Charles Nurse was a carter or carrier, and later corn and flour merchant in the village. His son Alfred is on the school photograph, middle row third child from the right..

¹² Stooks or propped up sheaves of corn.

¹³ William Failes was the farmer of Castle Farm whose huge barns stand in the middle of the village.

