

From Canon Foster to the Lincolnshire Archives Office

Sir Francis Hill

I do not precisely recall when I first met Canon Foster, the vicar of Timberland, but it was probably at a meeting of the Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society which I joined in 1924. He printed a paper of mine on Lincoln in the Society's annual report for 1925. He was quick to encourage any prospective worker in the local historical field, and at Timberland he showed me his library and the workshop he had built in the garden for the village girls he had trained to copy documents. He gave me a transcript of a list of mayors of Lincoln and lent me the originals of two others from either the diocesan or chapter archives which I published with notes in 1929. He arranged for me to visit Professor and Mrs. Stenton whose home was then at Southwell, and I am sure that my expression of admiration for Foster's work and concern that it should be secured and continued led to Foster's later decision to make me his solicitor and appoint me an executor and literary executor of his will. Lady Stenton was later to write in her British Academy memoir of her husband that I went to see them when I was an undergraduate, but I think this must be a mistake. She evidently remembered that I was very young, and she was right.

Foster was lonely; and he got into the habit of coming to see me at my office towards the end of a Friday market day, busy both for him and for me. He had little notebooks (some of which I later found in his library) in which he weekly set down the various missions he planned to discharge before he went home: the Probate Court, where one clerk was left to copy wills; the Diocesan Registry, where another clerk was left to do more advanced work; a diocesan committee meeting; a list of household requisites. I remember meeting him one day carrying a sieve, and asking whether it was for the sifting of evidence, to which he replied, 'No, the meshes are too large'. He would occasionally bring me a will which he had drafted for a parishioner and ask me to approve it. He was a prudent man: he always insisted on paying a fee, a small one, but it made me responsible. (One old lady whose will I proved was the last annuitant of the East India Company, which came to an end in 1858. Her father had been a servant of 'John Company' and died when she was an infant. On her death the India Office was able to close the books of the Company). He would tell me of the work he had in hand at the moment, and of recent interesting visitors or correspondence. Many times I heard of his schemes for arranging the charters in his *Registrum Antiquissimum of the Cathedral Church of Lincoln*, and he would try on me bits of his draft prefaces. He was specially pleased with his reference to Professor Stenton's first sight of box after box of charters: 'Each moment I expected to hear from his lips the famous "Pro-di-gi-ous" of the enthusiastic and simple-minded Dominie'. He was a little anxious that Stenton should not take it amiss, and he probably obtained reassurance from Doris Stenton before printing it.

He had long played a large part in diocesan affairs but

never received any further preferment in the Church. Professor Hamilton Thompson told me that he had tried to get him nominated for election to the British Academy, but he could not arouse any interest. The only recognition he received was the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from his own University of Oxford. It gave him the greatest pleasure, and he liked to be addressed as Dr. Foster. His friends always so addressed him, though after his death we at once reverted to the familiar and affectionate 'Canon'. It was supposed that Bishop Hicks had prompted the University decision. I once saw Dr. Foster wearing scarlet in his own church at one of the major festivals.

He was slow and deliberate in speech. His ideas were always clearcut, and he was remarkably effective in getting his way. After his death his wishes continued to guide affairs. He designated Miss Kathleen Major, who had just been appointed Diocesan Archivist, as his successor as editor and secretary of the Lincoln Record Society. He chose me as treasurer, and he thought that the Stentons as historians and I who was a solicitor and engaged in local government were well placed to realise his dreams for an archive office for the county, and left us in charge of his historical interests. He let the bishop know his wishes as to who should succeed him in his canonry and his living, and the bishop complied.

In 1935, shortly before his death, which he knew could not be long delayed, he had put to Bishop Hicks a plan for approaching the Pilgrim Trust for money to establish a diocesan record office in the Exchequer Gate at Lincoln, and provide salaries for staff and other expenses. So could then be carried on systematically work which he had done voluntarily and largely at his own expense. (He used to charge fees for compiling pedigrees, and he dealt in Lincolnshire books, his stock of them being kept in the wardrobe in his spare bedroom). The bishop welcomed the proposal and Canon Foster invoked the aid of his friend and ally the ninth Lord Monson in persuading the Diocesan Registrar to accept the plan. Formal application was made by the bishop to the Pilgrim Trust. Canon Foster thought that if the Trust could not provide a full salary they might join with the Lindsey County Council, which had just established its own muniment room, in doing so. Lord Macmillan (one of the Trustees) visited the Exchequer Gate, and on 6 July he told the bishop that the Trust would grant £1700 for the capital work required at the gate, and £500 per annum for three years for salaries and expenses. By October Miss Major was appointed archivist.

Canon Foster died on 29 October 1935. Though there had been discussion of an ambitious plan to set up a county record office, perhaps in the old prison at Lincoln Castle, it was a dream that no steps had been taken to realise. The immediate question was the disposal of Canon Foster's library and collection of manuscripts and transcripts, a matter which had been left in the discretion of the literary executors. We discussed it with the Lindsey County Council, who clearly offered the best line of advance. The County Clerk, Eric Scorer, was especially helpful. We explained that our real objective was a record office for the whole county, and with this understanding all the printed books were given to the county council; they could not otherwise have been expected to maintain the various series of publications, which was a condition of the gift. The transcripts and manuscripts were deposited only, thus leaving the executors a bargaining counter if such were needed. It was never needed. The Lindsey people were supporters of the Foster ideal, and later became supporters of the Archives Office. Much later, as the surviving literary executor, I formally converted the deposit into a gift to the Lincolnshire County Council.

The library was ceremonially handed over to the Lindsey

Council by Professor Stenton, and accepted by Lord Heneage, chairman of the council, which then appointed me a member of their Library Sub-Committee to represent the literary executors.

The Pilgrim Trust announcement had been made just in time to give pleasure to Canon Foster in the last weeks of his life. The new diocesan archivist, Miss Major, arrived a few days after his death, and as the Pilgrim Trust grant did not begin until January 1936 the literary executors were able to provide expenses for two months out of a fund which Canon Foster had left them to complete any work upon which he might be engaged at the time of his death. I remember having the greatest difficulty in getting from Bishop Hicks even an acceptance of this offer. His many virtues did not include a capacity for business. He would throw troublesome letters into a large rolltop desk and slam the lid: it was called 'the Wilderness of Sin'.

Early in 1937 the Pilgrim Trust were asking the bishop for accounts, and he asked me to go to the Old Palace to audit them. There were no accounts, just a few bills, a bank passbook and some cheque book stubs. With the aid of a member of my staff I produced a statement sufficient for the accommodating Pilgrim Trustees. Then I found myself treasurer of the Diocesan Records Fund, and held that office until the county office came into being.

Miss Major took up her appointment in the most discouraging conditions, but gradually the Exchequer Gate was fitted up, though with a minimum of comfort. Progress was interrupted by the outbreak of war. Many of the papers were removed for greater safety, and the office was kept open only part-time. Miss Major ceased to draw salary, so helping to conserve a small balance against the time when things returned to normal. She resigned in 1945.

In 1939 the bishop issued a circular saying that it had been intended to launch an appeal that autumn for the permanent maintenance of the office; the current Pilgrim Trust grant (I believe the second one) would diminish by £100 each year from March 1940 until it ceased altogether in 1942. He appealed for contributions.

This was a forlorn hope. No realist could ever have believed that short of a huge private benefaction the office could be maintained by voluntary giving. It was soon learnt that by the death of Richard Shuttleworth half of the residue of the estate of the late Alfred Shuttleworth, a wealthy Lincoln citizen, became divisible among charities in the city and county of Lincoln in the discretion of the trustees of the will. Lord Monson, who was one of the Shuttleworth Trustees, asked me to draw up a memorandum about the Diocesan Record Office with a view to applying for aid. As Lord Monson was ill I saw the trustees' solicitor, who knew nothing about the office, and questioned whether it was a charity. I consulted Lord Macmillan, who kindly drafted a letter for the bishop to send to the Shuttleworth Trustees in support of an application. I believe it was sent, but nothing happened.

It was fortunate that archives had a friend in Mr. (later Sir) Harold Banwell, who had been town clerk of Lincoln and became clerk to the Kesteven County Council. He and I often discussed the archives problem and possible ways forward, and he set himself to interest his chairman, Sir Robert Pattinson. This was no easy task, for Pattinson, who had been a builder by trade, was more interested in roads and local government finance than in archives; but he was persuaded to bring together the three county councils and the two county boroughs in Lincolnshire to discuss the idea of a joint county record office. Mr. Banwell's Kesteven successor Mr. J. E. Blow was just as keen, and he was to serve as clerk to the county archives committee for many years. The archives movement owes

both of them a great debt.

By 1943 a conference of the five authorities got to the length of approaching the Lincolnshire County Committee, which administered Lincoln Castle, with a view to taking a lease of the old gaol there for an archives office. The County Committee without commitment agreed to the exploration of possibilities.

Meanwhile the Shuttleworth Trustees had appointed a committee to advise them on distribution of their funds. Pattinson represented Kesteven, Lord Heneage Lindsey, and I Lincoln. We put forward the case for a county record office. The Trustees' solicitor mistakenly submitted to counsel the former diocesan proposal instead of the new county proposal, and the thing was bungled. Happily chances improved when Colonel (later Sir Weston) Amcotts became a Shuttleworth Trustee, and we sent to the Trust solicitor a proposal that the Bishop, the Dean and Chapter and private owners of documents should be allowed to deposit them in the county office without charge in consideration of a grant to this end by the Trustees; we suggested that such an offer would have a great influence on the local authorities, and might make the difference between success and failure of the county scheme. The appeal was successful, though I am not sure when we were formally notified that it was. The amount offered was £4000.

Progress was slow. On 1 October 1946 a special meeting of the Lincolnshire County Committee was attended by Sir Robert Pattinson, chairman of the provisional county records committee, Eric Scorer and his successor Herbert Copland for Lindsey, J. E. Blow for Kesteven, and myself for Lincoln. (Grimsby had withdrawn, but Holland was favourable, and its clerk Mr. Marris was always ready to help). Sir Robert gave a report of events since tentative approval had been given in 1943; plans and estimates had been prepared by Mr. T. R. Howitt, architect, for adaptation of the old goal; it had been inspected by Sir Hilary Jenkinson, Deputy Keeper of the Public Records, and been found suitable for the purpose. A central depository was desirable, and legislation was probable that would facilitate the plan; it would cost less than new buildings; private owners would deposit; and the prison chapel, an attraction to visitors to the castle, would still be open to inspection. The deputation was told that a repairing lease of ninety-nine years at a peppercorn rent would be recommended. It was approved on 18 October.

The county conference then set up a drafting committee consisting of the three county clerks and myself. The Lincolnshire Archives Committee was formally constituted on 24 October 1947, and elected Sir Robert Pattinson chairman, and me vice-chairman, with Mr. Blow as clerk and the Kesteven county treasurer as treasurer. Mrs. Varley had already been appointed Diocesan Archivist. She was then appointed County Archivist. The Lindsey County Council handed over the Foster library. After a few years Sir Robert Pattinson resigned the chairmanship, and was succeeded by Lord Ancaster, who held office until the reorganisation of local government.

I am not sure whether formal approval was ever given to the handing over of custody of the diocesan archives. When Bishop Harland came in 1947 I told him I had handed over all his archives to the county committee, to which he replied 'Oh, you have, have you?' Later I attended a meeting of his staff committee, and explained that this was the only chance they were ever likely to have to have their records looked after properly free of charge, and for all time. Bishop Harland agreed, and the matter was settled in half an hour. A few years later, with the consent of Bishop Riches, I paid the small remaining balance of the

Diocesan Records Fund to the Lincolnshire Archives Office treasurer.

The new committee at once ran into a legal difficulty. County councils had no statutory power to spend money on documents other than their own. In taking custody of ecclesiastical and private records we were doing no more than other counties, and many boroughs, which had vague common law powers and were not necessarily subject to district audit, had been collecting records in their public libraries for generations. But in the Lincoln case the office was a joint office, and there was an agreement that the district auditor could read, and confronted with illegality he refused to audit the accounts. So the Lincoln city treasurer became auditor. But the Minister of Housing and Local Government had a discretion to approve expenditure which was reasonable and likely to become the subject of legislation; and our expenditure was retrospectively approved. It would be a different matter if we wanted to raise a loan for capital work at the gaol, and needed a loan sanction. The only way out of that difficulty would be to provide the money by instalments out of income. Lord Ancaster and Mr. Blow and I went to London to see officials of the Ministry to ask for legislation (1953). Presently Sir Thomas Sheepshanks, the Permanent Secretary, wrote to me to say that he hoped to get an enabling measure, and when Dame Evelyn Sharp succeeded him I was in frequent touch with her on other matters, and I knew that she was waiting for a chance to get a clause into a Miscellaneous Provisions Bill to meet the point. She was so helpful that she assured one of the county councils (Holland, I believe) that if it incurred this illegal expenditure it would be approved. This we called prospective retrospective approval. The need was at last met by the Local Government Act 1962.

Meanwhile, we had gone forward. In 1951 we had the encouragement of a visit from the Master of the Rolls (Sir Raymond Evershed). The gaol was brought into use for storage of documents in 1955; in 1960 tenders were received for the work at the gaol, and the headquarters were moved to it from the Exchequer Gate in 1961.

The Archives Committee, being a joint committee, could not co-opt members, and we therefore set up a Technical and Advisory Committee of representatives of the Bishop, the Dean and Chapter, the Law Society, the Lincoln Record Society and the universities, in order to keep in touch with those bodies. It was useful in giving support and encouragement to the staff, and acting as a pressure group. I was made chairman of the committee, whose activities were closely watched by Sir Robert Pattinson, poised to ensure that long haired professors did not play ducks and drakes with the ratepayers' money. The staff of the office was gradually augmented to include five archivists with supporting staff.

When local government reorganisation took effect the Lincolnshire Archives Committee became a joint committee of the Lincolnshire and Humberside County Councils; now, with the withdrawal of Humberside, the office is grouped with Museums under a Museums and Archives Sub-Committee of the Lincolnshire County Council (with Sir Anthony Thorold as chairman) which, in spite of financial stringency, has shown itself mindful of the value and importance of the office.

No account is given here of the heroic labours of the archivists, first Miss Major and then Mrs. Varley in the diocesan office; and in the county office Mrs. Varley until her retirement in 1971 and her successor Mr. Lloyd, with their staff. I have dealt only with the institutional framework within which they worked. The introduction of new administrative arrangements provides a suitable moment for reviewing the events of forty years. I think that if

Canon Foster could see it all he would be pleased.

Book Reviews

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE VICTORIAN SERVANT by Pamela Horn, x + 221pp., illus., Gill and Macmillan, 1975, £8.50; LIFE BELOW STAIRS Domestic servants in England from Victorian times by Frank E. Huggett, 186pp., illus., John Murray, 1977, £4.95.

The Bellamies and the Bentinck have made us familiar with the world below stairs in the larger Edwardian household. These books describe the background to that world and put it in perspective. They remind us that most servant keeping households relied on a single hard-pressed maid of all work; they make it clear that even the better popular television series cannot give us a rounded picture of a great social institution.

The Rise and Fall of the Victorian Servant provides a framework of statistical material on employment and wages to stiffen the numerous anecdotes and particular instances it quotes. This expensive book offers a competently organised survey of the subject based on solid research in a variety of sources, though its academic presentation is marred by an insufficient and seemingly capricious use of source notes.

Life Below Stairs owes more than a little to Dr. Horn's book. It covers many of the same topics such as finding employment, daily routines, relationships between master and servant and within the servants' hall, the perils of life in service and twentieth century decline. It has the usual strengths and weaknesses of the work of popularisation. The text is shorter (though there are more notes) but it leaves a more vivid impression with the reader. However, this is the vividness of the journalist with his story rather than the historian with the gift of making the past come alive. Mr. Huggett is clear that service was a Bad Thing and guides us round the spectacle with an air of astonishment that such things could have been. Of course, impartiality is very difficult to achieve in recent social history: romantic nostalgia or outrage so easily form our prejudices. But it seems reasonable to hope for understanding in historical writing even if we cannot be completely neutral and detached from the subject.

The great strength of *Life Below Stairs* is the illustration. Jacqueline Spigel, its picture researcher, has assembled a fine collection of photographs and cartoons of the period. Some of the photographs are worth a thousand words and that on page 85 of a dress being lowered on to a crinolined lady is a magnificent encapsulation of that world we have lost. The cartoons are especially interesting for the implicit attitudes of the employing classes for whom they were published and underline the point made in both books that service is a key to the social history of two groups in Victorian society, upstairs as well as down.

Readers of this journal will be interested in the use made by both authors of directly collected reminiscences by former servants. (It is to be hoped that these collections will be deposited in local record offices to supplement diaries,