

From Aynho to The Bounty - Two essays by Barry Marriott on a true adventurer from the Apricot Village:

from a letter written by Gunner William Peckover to Joseph BANKS 1772.

What were the social and economic reasons for Gunner William Peckover, to leave the agricultural community where his family had worked for generations to follow a career in the Royal Navy, of the late 18th century?

William Peckover was born at Aynho in the county of Northamptonshire, on the 18th June 1748, to Daniel and Mary Peckover, (nee Avies): he was their first-born child. They were married at Banbury in Oxfordshire on the 19th November 1747 and had four other children; Jane (1749), Anne (1752), Elizabeth (1753) and Mary (1755). The Militia List for Walton and Aynho of 1762 describes Daniel as a poor man with three children, Elizabeth had died in 1757. It also refers to a William Peckover, "shoe maker poor man 1 child", this is Daniel's younger brother; born 1723, who married Catherine Side in 1761 and had one daughter Anne born in the same year. (Precise dating at this period was confused by the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar). The younger William's paternal grandparents were Samuel and Jane Peckover (nee Cleaver), they were married at Kings Sutton in 1720, had six children, who were brought up alone by "Widow Peckover", due to the sad circumstances of Samuel's death. The latter was an agricultural labourer, probably in the employ of the Cartwright family who were the Lords of the Manor and the major property owners in the parish of Aynho and Walton.

Samuel Peckover was seriously injured one day in 1731, when his arm was torn off in an accident; even today such an accident would be traumatic, but imagine the pain being suffered and the mental anguish with no medicine immediately available. The Parish records show, "Samuel Peckover a mortification after his arm had been cut off near the shoulderMr.Wisdom of Shipton who amputated Samuel Peckover's arm for £4-1s-6d but did not save his life" .

It is appropriate to illustrate the life style adopted so resourcefully by "Widow Peckover", who at the time of her husband's death was expecting their sixth child, because it will help to give an understanding of the early lifestyle and formative years of Gunner Peckover's family. Especially so when one compares the family fortunes of the Aynho family, with those of their ancestors at the local village of Charlton a mere 50 years earlier. Where those Peckovers, who were tailors, with land and property had considerable wealth; the wills of Daniel Peckover (16 February 1699) and John Peckover (19 July 1710) testify this, obviously led a more affluent lifestyle.

"Widow Peckover" was by this time in her late thirties, had resolved that she was not fit for full time manual labour, but that the skills she had would benefit the children, the elderly, the Parish and her family.

The Parish records as referred to in Nicholas Cooper's: Aynho; A Northamptonshire village; show, "It was obviously good sense to employ one pauper - Jane Peckover - to look after others, but she appears so frequently in the overseers accounts that one feels she must have had a real talent for caring for people."

The Records also show in 1743, that "Widow" Peckover was paid 1/0s to make two shirts for William Polton, aged 70, one of the old people in her care: and her young son had an award of £12/0/0 to pay for his apprenticeship, at the age of 14 years.

A situation therefore existed where our William Peckover had seen his sister Mary die within days of her birth in 1755; Elizabeth die in 1757; Jane married in 1781; Anne married in 1774 . His father and Uncle were referred to officially as "poor men", and it is fairly conclusive that there was no inherited wealth.

In such circumstances William Peckover would have nothing to lose by seeking his fortune elsewhere; at the same time here would have been the opportunity to enjoy the adventures of a young man.

THE GEO-POLITICAL INFLUENCES CONCURRENT WITH THE AGRARIAN REFORMS IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE IN 17TH AND 18TH CENTURIES

Northamptonshire by the early 18th century had the least area of land turned over to enclosure in England; but in the period 1750 to 1819 more than 50% of the county had been changed over to enclosure. This took away from the general population the ability to be self sufficient in the supply

of foodstuff for the family. Although this made very little difference to the distribution of wealth; the King the Barons and the Church had always taken the lion's share and would continue to do so. Parliament paid little attention to the protestations of the population about enclosure of the common fields. Parliament put its activities into passing private acts for enclosure and the major changes in land usage in Northamptonshire came about through these private acts. Trevelyan puts it thus:-

"After the 3rd decade of the 18th century the work began to be carried on by a new and more wholesale procedure: private acts of Parliament were passed which overrode the resistance of the individual proprietors to enclosure; each had to be content with the land or the money compensation awarded to him by Parliamentary Commissioners whose decisions had the force of law. This was the radicalism of the rich at the expense of the poor."

The enclosure of the countryside began in the Middle Ages throughout Europe, but is mostly associated with England, as a means of improving efficient use of the land. It had two peaks here, the 15th and 16th centuries and throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. During the Anglo-Saxon period, villages had the "common fields" about them and the people took a "strip", known as a furlong, in each of those fields, for food production. In Northamptonshire today the affects of regular and continuous use of the Anglo-Saxon long plough can be seen in the fields as "ridge and furrow". In the village of Kings Sutton, Northants, near to Astrop House, on the road to Upper Astrop is a fine example on the left hand side. The local landlords would see enclosure as a means of increasing their landholding, for a very small financial compensation to the commoner with the rights to the land. The end result on the landscape was smaller fields, which could produce food more efficiently; the start Agrarian Revolution; and the field pattern of hedges so pleasing to the eye in this age of leisure and aesthetics.

Travellers at the time had a romantic vision of this green and pleasant land, and did not always see the underlying poverty and latent aggression of the populous towards the ruling classes.

Arthur Young in "Farmer's Tour through East of England: Eastern Tour 1; 1771" wrote in glowing terms of what he observed: -

"...the rich and well-farmed grazing lands of Northamptonshire drew forth a paeon of praise. There cannot be a finer sight than the view of the closes through out this country.... The quantity of great oxen and sheep is very noble; it is very common to see from forty to sixty oxen, and two hundred sheep in a single field; and the beasts are all of a fine large breed, well made, good skins and form altogether an appearance greatly striking. This effect is owing in no slight degree to the nature of the country, which is wholly composed of gentle hills, so that you look over many hundred acres at one stroke of the eye, and command all the cattle feeding in them in a manner nobly picturesque. Stock in a fiat is lost; but to see numerous herds of fine beasts spread over the sides of waving hills is a sight that cannot fail of delighting the spectator. Eastern Tour, I, 53-4 "1"

Arthur Young was not untypical in his views, Celia Fiennes and William Cobbett, were observers in the same vein, but it is only too easy to ride by on horse back stop at a coaching inn, and ignore the poverty of the family shippin. Unrest, at enclosure, in the countryside was manifested in a variety of ways, The Northampton Mercury reported on the 29th July 1765: -

"West Haddon, Northamptonshire, July 27

This is to give notice to all Gentlemen Gamesters and Well-Wishers to the Cause now in Hand That there will be a FOOT-BALL PLAY in the Fields of Haddon aforesaid, on Thursday the 1st day of August, for a Prize of considerable Value, and another good prize to be play'd for on Friday the 2nd....

All Gentlemen Players are desired to appear at any of the Public Houses in Haddon aforesaid each Day between the Hours of Ten and Twelve in the Forenoon, where they will be joyfully received; and kindly entertained etc."

This advertisement is not referring to the sport so enjoyed on every continent today, refereed and controlled by FIFA, this was a no holds barred, no restriction on numbers per side. The clue in the advertisement is the phrase "well-Wishers to the Cause now in Hand". For it was common to bring groups protesters together for a demonstration under the umbrella of another legitimate cause. In this case The Northampton Mercury reports on the 5th August 1765: -

"Northampton. We hear from West Haddon, in this County, that on Thursday and Friday last, a great number of people being assembled there in order to play a Foot-Ball Match, soon after many

formed themselves into a tumultuous Mob, and pulled up and burnt the Fences designed for the Inclosure of that Field, did other considerable Damage, many of whom are since taken up for the same by a Party of General Mordaunt's Dragoons sent from this Town."

But this social unrest was not limited to the enclosure of land, nor to a limited number of years in the 18th century; labour became cheaper, the price of food rose, rents increased as did the parsons' tithe and the profits of the farmers. Tobias Smollett, in the 2nd volume of "The History of England", published in 1888, wrote: -

" The highways were infested with rapine and assassination; the cities teemed with brutal votaries of lewdness, intemperance, and profligacy. The whole land was overspread with a succession of tumult, riot, and insurrection, excited..... by the erection of new turnpikes..."

For young men like William Peckover the World, of there local and national experience, must have appeared to be a very uninviting prospect, with little to offer even if one was prepared to be industrious. Even the honest labourer was incapable of earning enough to keep family and home together, and escape from this purgatory would come from either drink; gin was cheap; or from seeking respite in another more amenable society.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND THE PARADOX OF IMPROVED HEALTH CARE UPON THE GENERAL WELL-BEING OF THE POPULATION IN THE 18TH CENTURY.

The population of England and Wales, from the accession of Queen Anne, doubled to 10 million by the end of the 18th century and led Thomas Malthus to write in 1798 his " Essay on the Principle of Population". Malthus argued that whilst food production increased at an arithmetic level, the population rose by a geometric progression, causing mankind to live at, and to remain at near starvation. Talbot-Griffiths in " Population Problems of the Age of Malthus", CUP 1926, estimates that the birth rate in 1750 was 3.5% compared to a death rate of 2.8%, with the latter falling. These conditions brought about the increase in agrarian reforms and change in land ownership, but as shown above did little to alleviate the immediate lifestyle of the populous. It is opined by G.M. Trevelyan in his work, "English Social History" Longmans, 1942, that the death rate was affected by the common man changing his drinking habits from beer to cheap gin, and that a whilst it increased it eventually went into decline. Notwithstanding, of course, the impression made upon our minds by the engravings of Hogarth. The Leeds Intelligencer, of the 7th August 1764 reports about George Kirton aged 124, as a person leading a full life," And as a proof that length of days are not always entailed on a life of temperance and sobriety, he was an instance to the contrary, for no man, even to within ten years of his death, made freer with the bottle..."

Market forces played a part in the well being of families, in that as the population increased, and land use became more efficient, the price of labour fell. Parish relief was badly administered by local government, where the unfortunate were seen as a burden upon the wealthier villagers and were subsequently driven out of their home village. Although by contrast on the 11 August 1766 the inhabitants of Sherborne in Dorset contributed to the purchase of wheat at 10s. a bushel and sold it on to the poor at 7s. and intended to do so until the harvest came in. Nevertheless the pages of newspapers for the mid-18th century are littered with reports of riots over shortages of bread, butter and corn, with a particularly sad occurrence of death from starvation at Datchworth in Hertfordshire. A letter appeared in the Kentish Gazette on the 28 January 1769, giving details of " a man, his wife and three children had perished the floor of their wretched hovel was covered with their naked and emaciated carcasses! ". The writer of the letter, a retired army officer, Philip Thicknesse attempted to get the churchwardens prosecuted for neglect under the Poor Relief Act, but failed.

William Peckover was raised in a period of English history where social deprivation was endemic throughout the land, with little prospect of improvement. It was a time of transition, where the Agrarian revolution was depriving the people of food and employment, but the Industrial Revolution had yet to manifest its benefits. In time the drift of the population away from rural communities into the towns and cities would solve the problems of poverty, if only for an interim period.

A CONCLUSION: THAT DESPITE THE GOVERNMENTAL NEGLECT OF THE ARMED SERVICES, WILLIAM PECKOVER WAS COMPELLED TO GO TO SEA IN THE ROYAL NAVY.
The English Parliament opened its session of 1750 with the inclusion of a proposal to limit the armed services to 18,857 men, including 1,815 invalids and 8000 seamen. The Government had

conceded to the Spanish and the French the control of the World's oceans, the proposition, was opposed by William Pitt amongst others, but was nevertheless passed.

Admiral Vernon said of the Royal Navy, in the reign of George II, "our fleets are defrauded by injustice, manned by violence and maintained by cruelty". The notorious press gang was the navy's standard method of recruitment in time of war, and resistance to being pressed into service was high. At Bromsgrove in 1756 a man who was caught by the press gang cut one of his fingers off and mutilated another; the Regulating Officer did not relent. The Naval Officer expressing the opinion that the man was still a match for any Frenchman.

Trevelyan, *ibid*, wrote that the Government treated soldiers and sailors worse than private employers their servants, that on a Man'O'War the food was scanty and foul, the pay was inadequate and discipline was iron. By comparison the sea going life of fishermen and merchant seamen was rigorous and hard, but better than for any men in service of the Royal Navy. However by 1758 the Government had a change of policy, the size of the Royal Navy was put at 60,000, and the Standing Army at 53,777, but still including invalids of 4,000. Tobias Smollett, *ibid*, wrote of the same session, "In consequence of a motion made by Mr. Grenville, a humane bill was prepared and brought in for the encouragement of seamen employed in the royal navy, establishing a regular method for the punctual, frequent, and certain payment of their wages; enabling them more easily and readily to remit money for the support of their wives and families, and preventing the frauds and abuse attending such payments".

This change, by the Government, in the numbers required by the Navy came about as a consequence of the declaration of war with France in the previous year. It was also realized that England had to patrol and control the World's oceans and its trade routes, thus ensuring that the import of foodstuffs and raw materials would not stop.

For William Peckover the vision of his future was opening up before him, with at first a choice between remaining on the land to eke out a living. Surrounded, as he would have been by wholesale discontent throughout the countryside and the towns, or seeking out a better alternative. In some respects though he did not have the option of staying in his native County, because as has been illustrated previously, living for people such as him held out no hope for their future well being.

It is possible that a recruiting officer may have passed through the Cherwell Valley following the start of another Continental War, and feelings of loyalty to the Crown arose in him. His later letter to Joseph Banks, 1772, talks of a sense of duty to serve his country faithfully, which without doubt makes it clear he was not pressed into the service. The alternative to joining the army would have been influenced in a way by the empirical evidence, for Peckover would have witnessed the brutality of the army in quelling riots, and the hostility to the army from the people. The Royal Navy offered security and shelter, a regular income and daily bread and according to Maslow, the American psychologist, these are a man's basic needs on the path to success.

William Peckover was a man of ambition. For as Beaglehole, the biographer of James Cook's three circumnavigations of the globe, records in the Muster Role Peckover joined as a gunner's mate 4th February 1772, from being an A.B. on the first voyage. Beaglehole quotes from the letter to Banks, *ibid*; "I am now Emboldened to solicit your goodness to have me appointed Supernumery Midshipman in one of the "ships"". He was therefore determined to leave behind him the hovel of his childhood and "hazard" his life and future prosperity with the Royal Navy.

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