

A RECTOR OF BRUNTINGTHORPE

BY HUGH GOODACRE

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MANY years ago there came into my possession, whence I have now forgotten, two old Georgian account books. Bound in the familiar apple-green vellum of the period, one with a metal clasp, they carry us back into the days of coaches and post-chaises, of taverns and coffee-houses, of wigs and breeches, quills and wax. Even the pounce still sparkles on the blots it dried more than a hundred and fifty years ago!

Curiously, as we open the green covers, the name of the owner of the books nowhere appears, and we have to search the mellow pages for many a long day before we can establish his identity. That he was a clergyman is soon apparent, but we have to follow him for nearly ten years before we can pronounce with certainty that he was the Reverend Sambrook Nicholas Russell, sometime rector of Bruntingthorpe and Saddington in this county of Leicester of ours.

The following paper makes no attempt at a biography of the reverend gentleman; rather is it in the nature of an autobiography; for it is gathered almost exclusively from his own words, as they speak to us from the pages of Nichols or in his own handwriting from the little green account books as he left them when he closed them for the last time.

That the impression we may form of Mr. Russell may differ materially from that formed by his contemporaries is very possible: but we must remember that the standards by which we judge to-day had not reached their present acceptance in the second half of the eighteenth century. Then the holding of cures was a recognised business; there were no effective restrictions on pluralities; cures were farmed to the best advantage. This was the temporal side of the picture: there was, admittedly, the other side; but this, as often as not, concerned itself with little beyond law and rubric.

Mr. Russell was unquestionably held in high esteem in his day. In fact, the historian Nichols dedicates two views of the rectory at Bruntingthorpe to his memory, and adds that he does

so "in pleasing remembrance of a few of the happy hours which 'gladden life' occasionally passed in it during the occupancy of the late truly respectable incumbent, Mr. Russell; whose conversation was at all times edifying; and whose convivial talents, when amongst familiar friends he was disposed to relax from the sterner habits of rigid austerity, were only exceeded by the profundity of his erudition". A truly illuminating eulogy when we meet the reverend gentleman face to face in his accounts!

The period covered by the account books is roughly thirty-two years, and when we first make Mr. Russell's acquaintance he is living in the neighbourhood of Basingstoke. From the number of entries for horse-hire, and the still more numerous entries of gifts to different people's maids and servants, it looks as if at this period he was spending his time in a round of social visits; but from an epitaph from his own pen, to be mentioned later, we learn that the first seven years of his ministry were spent in his native place near Basingstoke, from which it may be assumed that he held some cure there, unless it was to this period that must be assigned the chaplaincy to the Princess Amelia, to which he refers in the epitaph already mentioned, but to which there is no allusion in the account books.

It is clear, I think, that he was an attractive personality, ready to take his hand at a game of cards (even as an indifferent player, if we may judge from the number of losses he records), and adding to his accomplishments a varied musical talent. We know from his accounts that from time to time he purchased music and took tickets for concerts and oratorios, and that he had in his possession a fiddle, a violin, a flute and a German flute, and also that he was an enthusiastic member of a Music Club.

But the reverend gentleman's social activities were not confined to what we should now-a-days call "the drawing-room"; they carried him further afield, and we find ourselves accompanying him to the play, dining with him in inns and taverns, regaling ourselves with him in coffee-houses in the Green Park and at Richmond, and not drawing the line at the public gardens of Ranelagh, Marylebone or Vauxhall. Not that there is any suggestion of impropriety in any of these things; they were the vogue of the day, a vogue from which the clergy were not excluded.

That the modern agitation against intoxicants would have found in him a champion is hardly to be expected, and we find

him placing no ban on wine, brandy, rum, gin and small-beer, all of which make their way into his accounts. On occasion he gives as much as eight shillings for a bottle of wine, but as a rule he is content with a more modest vintage. In one instance, when he had purchased a bottle for one and eight pence, he seems to have had his doubts; for we find him taking the precaution of providing himself with a quarter of an ounce of, what he calls, "Rhubarb of Portsmouth".

The accounts do not lead us to regard Mr. Russell as a man of extravagant tastes. He made considerable purchases of theological books, it is true, but these he no doubt regarded as tools of his trade. He did, however, occasionally have a flutter, as when he bought some medals for nine shillings; but these, he tells us ruefully, turned out to be "not worth a groat". One cannot help hoping that his discernment was less at fault in the extensive purchases of furniture and bric-à-brac in which he indulged whenever the accession to an additional cure brought an augmentation to his income, although, when he tells us he bought a Dutch picture for the dining-room for £2 6s. 0d. and "another by Sir Peter Lely" for seven shillings, we rather tremble.

One of these excursions into the realms of sales and furniture shops followed Mr. Russell's appointment to the curacy of St. Giles-in-the-fields, which he tells us took place at Lady Day, 1765. His stipend here was £50 a year paid by the rector, a certain Dr. Gally, and £23 paid by the churchwardens. In addition he became entitled to certain perquisites in the shape of fees for special services, and what he calls "trophies", by which I think he means scarfs, hat-bands and gloves, all of which he enters under the heading "Incidental Profits of the Curacy of St. Giles".

It was these "Incidental Profits", by the way, which brought him into conflict with his rector.

It seems to have been the custom to hand a fee on special occasions to the curate, and to instruct him to give the rector his due out of the amount and keep the rest for himself. This is what happened on the 20th August, 1765, under which date we get this entry :—

Given me by my Lord Tavistock for X [christening] and
chg [churching] 2—12—6.

Note I had orders to pay the Dr. his demand and keep the rest.

The year's accounts close with this entry :

Dr. Gally cheated me of Fifty Shillings in the affair of Lord Tavistock's Christening. The whole money above the Fees was given expressly to me & I ought to have kept it in pursuance of my positive Agreement with the Rector. But these fellows have usually neither Humanity nor Honesty. *experto credite.*

Mr. Russell's appointment to the curacy of St. Giles was quickly followed by that to the chaplaincy of St. Mary Overy's, which he entered on the 7th July of the same year; but neither of these appointments apparently terminated his Hampshire connection, and we find him still continuing his visits to Basingstoke and other places in that county.

There is another chaplaincy which Mr. Russell seems to have held at this time, and to which he makes frequent reference, namely, that of "St. Saviour's"—I imagine of Southwark, since in a later note he tells us he has arranged with a Mr. Wilby, "Curate of St. Olave's, Southwark", to do his private duty at St. Saviour's for twenty-five guineas a year.

No difficulty in arranging for the discharge of his numerous duties seems to have presented itself; there was always a humble curate ready at hand to undertake them for a modest salary, and so we find that, having disburdened himself of his private duties at St. Saviour's, Mr. Russell arranged with a Mr. Thomson to bury the dead at St. Giles's for him for twenty pounds a year, and to read prayers there every Sunday afternoon, and on Wednesday and Friday morning of every other week for five shillings per week, a fee which certainly does not seem to err on the generous side.

At the close of 1765 Mr. Russell takes stock. In "An Account of what I made of the Curacy of St. Giles, Middlesex", he shows how he cleared £79 9s. 1½d. for three-quarters only of the year; but this was exclusive of two hat-bands and a pair of gloves which he had accidentally omitted to enter. The revenue from these "trophies" was not altogether negligible. Hat-bands were resaleable at about four shillings apiece, and scarfs at

fifteen, if we may judge from the price of £4 10s. 0d. obtained from his own sister for half-a-dozen.

In 1765 Mr. Russell would appear to have been living in lodgings somewhere in London in the house of a Mrs. Heemshirk; but on the 12th of January 1766, he entered into an agreement with a Mr. Jennings to let him his lodgings unfurnished, "except as to a bed and stove grate", for twelve guineas a year; and he adds a note stating that it was agreed that he should pay Mr. Jennings one shilling when he dined with him.

By this time the fame of Mr. Russell as a preacher had become established, and we find him preaching at the Temple and other well-known London churches, and receiving as much as £3 13s. 6d. for a single sermon. On the 25th April, 1768, he added the curacy of Marylebone to his list of cures at a stipend of £60 per annum.

We get our first mention of Leicestershire in a note in February 1770, recording that Mr. Russell's journey into that county, and his Induction, had cost him twenty pounds.

The accounts do not make things very clear at this point; but it looks as if our versatile friend had launched out in another direction, and had commenced to take in pupils. On the 28th July 1770, we have this note:—

Received of Mr. Walsh for the care of Master	} 150 . 0 . 0
Fowke from Dec. 25 1769 to 28 May 1770	
50 £ & in advance 100	

Another note tells us that Francis Forte came to board on 28th May, 1770, and "Arthur" about the 6th June. Who "Arthur" was does not transpire. Seeing that Master Fowke's year was up on the 28th May, 1770, it looks as if Francis Forte had taken his place. In Mr. Russell's account of his takings for the year 1770 he credits himself with a hundred pounds received for the board of Master Pybus, but I do not think this was for the whole year. On the 2nd January, 1772, Master Thompson enters the establishment, and finally, on the 16th October following, Master Beckford, for a consideration of £120 a year and "washing at his mother's when in town".

After this we hear no more of pupils, unless any of our readers are tempted to see an indication of their presence in the caution that prompts the entry 'βορροοδ οφ βιρηθ θιρτυ πουνδς', but to do this they will have to assume a very low classical

standard in Mr. Russell's academy. It is more likely that it was to guard against the prying eyes of that lowly-paid maid, of whom we are to hear in a minute, that he adopted this puerile device than against those of his pupils.

Exactly where Mr. Russell resided at this time I do not know, but I think it must have been in the neighbourhood of his curacy at Marylebone, for he frequently mentions Marylebone Gardens. That it was not at Bruntingthorpe is certain, for he had let his parsonage there to a farmer name Kilbourne, with whom he subsequently found himself at law.

But while the accounts do not give us the actual situation of the house, they do supply us with the name of the landlord and the amount of the rent. "I came into Mr. Hoy's house", writes Mr. Russell, "on the 6th of Sept, 1770. Rent 30 £ pr Ann. to commence from Michaelmas next"; and I think it is evident he had this house in mind when, at the same Michaelmas, he inserts in his account book "A Calculation of my Household Expenses for a Family of Six Persons". After allowing £40 for Rent and Taxes, £20 for Man's wages, and £8 for Maid's, he brings his estimate up to £332. From this it looks as if three was the maximum of boarders contemplated.

Mr. Russell paid £11 3s. 3d. "First Fruits" for Bruntingthorpe on the 3rd May, 1770, and in July and August of the following year he made a prolonged visit to the neighbourhood, which he tells us cost him £9 16s. 2d.

In 1772 we find him venturing forth in yet another direction, this time as the historian of the Duchy of Lancaster. From Nichols we learn that his brother Francis, whom he mentions in his accounts, was a distinguished officer of the Duchy, and it is evident that he had influence behind him; for we find him laying out considerable sums upon research work and the purchase of books, and receiving a grant of £67 from the Treasurer of the Duchy by order of Lord Hyde. But whether he ever brought his work to completion I am doubtful, for in a note attached by way of preface to some entries relating to expenditure in connection with his history he says:—

Money expended about my Duchy History which I began about March 1772, but I was soon stopped by a Disease in my Eyes which I caught in the Autumn Preceding either by riding in an intense hot day, or by

washing my feet in very hot weather in extreme cold water. I have been so frequently stopped by this weakness in my Eyes (which seemed to be pretty near well when I began this work) that I have not writ a word without Pain, & I have been frequently obliged to lay it aside for several months together.

18 Mar., 1774.

S.R.

On the 4th April, 1777, Mr. Russell commenced to build the parsonage at Bruntingthorpe. This was necessitated by the destruction of the old rectory by fire. There is, or was until lately, a statement in Mr. Russell's handwriting that the fire was occasioned by the stupidity of someone in lighting a fire in an old disused chimney. The statement also describes the old rectory as consisting of a large hall, with a narrow extension containing a number of small rooms. Mr. Russell also records that there was a moat, which he filled in, possibly with the debris of the demolished house.

The rector would appear to have been his own architect, and not to have employed a contractor. It took him, according to his own statement, until January of 1779 to finish the work, but I think this must mean until everything was cleared up. His bricks, timber, lead, sand, were all bought and paid for separately, and some of his materials, such as oil, paint and glass, he obtained from London, as he did his locks; even the lead which he purchased elsewhere he had cast into gutters for him by a Lutterworth plumber named Taylor. When he ultimately makes up his accounts he finds his house has cost him £595 10s. 1½d.

There is a tradition still current in Bruntingthorpe that Mr. Russell raised a sum of money by subscription to rebuild his parsonage and restore his church, but that he spent so much on the house that there was nothing left for the church—a not incredible eventuality!

Whatever the rector's capabilities may have been as an architect, the little sketches and plans in his account book do not lead us to place a high value on his powers as an artist; a child of six or seven could have done them better. However, he erected his house, and what is more, it is still standing, although greatly enlarged and altered. But our wonder that it is so is increased when we compare it with Mr. Russell's plans, for, apart from

the deflection of his walls from the perpendicular, he seems all at sea in his bearings. What he describes as his "west front" is unquestionably his east, and I have my doubts about his "south front", for he shows it with six windows, while the south front of the house never had more than four. He gives a third "elevation", but he has omitted to say which front it purports to be; as this has four windows I am inclined to think it is his south. The side with the six windows may have been the west, but this has now been obscured by the modern addition. Mr. Russell's ground plan is still more puzzling, and, as he does not give the marks of the compass, it is impossible to follow him satisfactorily. He shows a Vestibule, Parlour, Little Parlour, and Kitchen.

In one respect I should think he was in advance of his time, for surely it is unusual to order the fruit trees you intend to nail to your walls before your walls are up! But this is what the rector of Bruntingthorpe did, and here we have them all:—Jargonel, Chrysan, Brown Bury, Burgamy (I give his own spelling), and Apricot for the west side; Duke Cherry, Red Roman Nectarine and Royal George Peach for the south side; and so on round the house, not omitting a Mud Wall with south aspect.

In 1777 Mr. Russell obtained the presentation to the living of Saddington, to which he was instituted on the 18th and inducted on the 21st July by his curate, Mr. Arnold.

From this time onwards he became immersed in agriculture, although his accounts disclose no spectacular success. I expect the Midland farmer then, as now, had an eye for any pigeon that might come his way! One of them, however, Parnel by name, evidently won the confidence of the clerical amateur, and received in reward the following somewhat trite and ponderous epitaph, but whether it ever got further than the fly-leaf of Mr. Russell's account book I do not know:—

An inscription intended for the Grave stone of poor farmer
Parnel of Walton who was very useful to me on my
affair of Husbandry.

To the Memory of
Nathaniel Parnel of this parish,
A judicious & industrious farmer;
And a plain, quiet, honest,

Goodnatured Man,
 Who, after a life of 60 years & days
 Deceased on the 8th June 1788.
 With awful pause, good reader, view the road,
 That leads each faithful Christian to his God.
 Through life's dark vale, & death's still darker way
 He presses onward to celestial day.
 Amidst the horror that surrounds him Here,
 Think of the glories that await him There :
 Thrice happy he, who with our buried friend,
 By conscious virtue gains a blissful end.
26 July 1788 S.R.

Mr. Russell died on the 29th November 1795, at Saddington, where he was buried, and where a slab in the chancel pavement formerly thus recorded the fact :

H.S.E. [*Hic sepultus est*]
 SAMBROOK NICHOLAS RUSSELL, M.A.
 hujusce ecclesie rector
 Obiit XXIX die Novembris,
 anno Domini MDCCXCV
 aetatis suae LXIII.

This slab, probably with much else of interest, has been obliterated by that detestable practice of the last century of covering the floors of our churches with Minton tiles.

Although the account books cannot, of course, convey to us the features of this virile old cleric, yet they bring us into such close contact with him and his surroundings, that we cannot help forming for ourselves some distinct, if erroneous, mental picture, both of his personal appearance, and of his individuality.

That he differs little from many another divine of his day whose portrait has come down to us, I doubt not. The church was his profession—his livelihood, and no one thought the worse of him for trying to make the most of it. As a man, he seems to have been kind-hearted, generous, sociable; but we get little indication of any recognition of the more serious side of his calling. He was, in fact, a professional clergyman, wearing the mask demanded of the cloth of his time, and complying with the demeanour expected of him in his sacerdotal capacity; but his service to the Church, whatever he may himself have thought to the

contrary, was proportionate only, and we may perhaps get some idea of what the proportion was from the following three consecutive entries :—

Gave at the Sacrament at B-stoke	00	00	06
Bought 2 Pieces of Hose	00	10	00
Spent at the Music Club	00	02	00

That Mr. Russell was conscious of a social and intellectual superiority, I think, is clear, and we have distinct evidence of the satisfaction he derived from his personal appearance. His friend Nichols makes a chivalrous attempt to shield him from the imputation of vanity, but Mr. Russell's own words do much to substantiate the charge.

And yet, in spite of his obvious shortcomings, there is something so human about the man that it is with a sort of affection I find myself taking my leave of him, seated in his "Best Parlour" at Bruntingthorpe, a "Carved Chimney Glass" above the mantelpiece, a "Large Pier Glass" on the opposite wall—sitting in his armchair "stuffed & covered with green Moreen", between his dining-table and "Large stove and fender of Queen's metal", whilst by the wall stands the card table it is so impossible to disassociate from him; a Fire Screen and four "stuffedback Chairs with cheque covers" completing the simple inventory of the room as he himself gives it to us.

The stool and fender of Queen's metal have gone; a modern tiled hearth has taken their place; but the boldly-carved egg-and-tongue moulding which framed them still remains, and forms a tangible link between the present rector of Bruntingthorpe, as he smokes his pipe in his book-lined study, and his predecessor of a century and a half ago.

Mr. Russell, as I see him, is still handsome, his powdered wig setting off to advantage his rubicund complexion, and although his stockings—"hose" as he would have called them—are no longer of silk, for Bruntingthorpe has no call for ought but worsted, yet the rest of his attire has never succumbed to the environment of his later days, and he would still pass with distinction in the best of London company.

Slowly, I see him remove his horn-rimmed spectacles and wipe with a red silk handkerchief his poor weak eyes; then, replacing his glasses, I see him take a quill from the pewter ink-pot at his side, examine the nib and, finding it to his satisfaction,

draw a sheet of paper towards him and commence to write. There, too, close at hand, is his pounce pot, a box of wafers and that white cornelian seal of his which we saw him paying over two pounds to have "engraved and set in gold" when the foibles of fashion meant more to him than they do to-day.

It is the 6th of November in the year 1793, a day typical of the season—cold, damp, dull; and the gloom, in spite of the cheerful flicker of the fire, has penetrated into the Best Parlour and given a sombre lead to the rector's thoughts. Let us see what he is writing. There is no need to draw further on our imagination, for amongst his papers was found after his death the identical document in his own handwriting.

My epitaph [it reads] on a marble slab, in the chancel of Saddington, 6 Nov., 1793. S.R.

Siste paulisper, Viator,
dum te docet optimus ille præceptor,
sepulchrale saxum.
Ecce ad pedes tuos jacet,
Heu! sordido pulvere obrutus et commixtus;
(reminiscere quantum sis)
SAMBROOK NICHOLAUS RUSSELL, A.M.
et clericus olim a domesticis
AMELIAE ALTISSIMAE FILIAE GEORGII II.
Si petus unde ortus; ingenuus
per longam stirpem; et quod
melius, bonis creatus.
Si cultum quæras; in pueritia,
WINTONIAE inter WICCAMICOS;
postea, adulta ætate,
in Academia Oxoniensi
inter Reginenses,
humanis et sacris literis
feliciter imbrutus.
Primo prope BASINGSTOKIAM
in South-hantoniensi agro,
ubi natus fuit, septem circiter annis;
deinde LONDINIIS, præcipue
in parochia Sanctæ Mariæ
le Bourne, quinque ferme lustris;
deum in ecclesiis suis ruralibus,

clericales exercuit curas;
 et ibi confenuit, et occubuit.
 Summam navabat operam,
 ut esset integer vitæ scelerisque purus,
 urbanus, literatus, decens, plus sapiens,
 Quantum profecerit, alii judicent,
 qui melius norint ipsum,
 quam ipse se.

I am indebted to my friend Mr. Mark Olver for the following sympathetic translation :—

Rest for awhile, oh traveller,
 And be ye enlightened by the tomb-stone,
 The best of instructors.
 Behold, here lieth at thy feet,
 buried, alas, and mingled with the sordid dust;
 (Be ye thus reminded of thy insignificance)
 SAMBROOK NICHOLAS RUSSELL, M.A.
 Once indeed chaplain to
 AMELIA, THE ELDEST DAUGHTER OF GEORGE II.
 In case ye may be wondrous of his ancestry,
 He was born of a good family,
 And what is better, born in good circumstances.
 His education, moreover, was commenced in his tender years
 At WINCHESTER among the WYKEHAMISTS;
 Continued later, at a more responsible age,
 Among the fellows of QUEENS OXFORD
 Where he was fruitfully instructed
 In earthly and sacred letters.
 He first carried out his clerical duties
 For seven years at his birthplace near BASINGSTOKE
 In the county of South-hamptonshire;
 Then for about five lustres [25 years] in LONDON
 Principally in the parish of
 Saint Mary Le Bourne';
 And finally in his own country parish
 Where he died and was buried.
 He accomplished the highest possible work
 And was vigorous throughout his days, and spotless
 In regard to crime. He was refined [of speech], well read,

Comely, pious, wise; how much he successfully accomplished
Others who knew him better
than himself, may judge.

Nichols evidently thought the epitaph calling for some apologia for he writes:—

His executor has attentively complied with what appears to have been his intention; and it is hoped that the memory of a worthy man will be sufficiently protected from any suspicion of vanity, in writing his own epitaph, by the frequency of the practice, the known truth of the facts recorded in the inscription, and especially by the modesty, as well as the elegance, of its conclusion.

May we not leave it at that? Nichols, let us remember, knew the man, and the reputation he enjoyed; moreover, he was familiar with the times in which he lived. There is much that is strange and incongruous to us in the ways and views of our forefathers of a hundred and fifty years ago; but I doubt if they would not find more to perplex them in those of us of to-day—a thought with which I am well content to close this sketch of an old rector of Bruntingthorpe.