

FROM: RAMBLING RECOLLECTIONS OF A RURAL MILLER.

Produced Privately by PHILLIP MANCOCK 1980

Copied from a copy in the possession of Mr Frank Hancock - nephew of the late Mr Phillip Hancock July 1941.

APPENDIX D

JOHN RUSSELL

John Russell's father, Caleb Oyler Russell married his cousin Miss Honess.

There were six children, three boys and three girls. John was the second boy, Paul being the eldest and Philip the youngest.

It is often said that cousins should not marry as it is too close a relationship. The children of such marriages are often abnormal. This was the case with the Russell family.

There is a fine dividing line between genius and insanity. John was a genius, whereas his elder brother Paul, was mentally deficient. His younger brother Philip was very artistic and poetical.

John employed them both in the business at Union Mill, Cranbrook, where they worked at routine jobs, but would not accept responsibility. In other words, John carried them as passengers to a large extent.

One day a traveller from Ranks, the Millers, called to introduce their new "Blue Cross Balanced Rations" and enquired for the Governor. The men in the mill told him that John was in the forge, supervising the tempering of Mill bills.

The young man on finding John in overalls asked him if he was the Governor - John replied, "I am the so-called Governor".

The smartly dressed representative then asked him, "Could I interest you in our new Blue Cross Rations? We should like you to be a stockist."

John looked at him seriously for a short time, then putting his hand on his shoulder said, "My dear fellow, I already have two crosses" - his two brothers - "to carry and I don't want a third let alone a blue one."

The young man left without another "stockist". John's sense of humour was a saving grace, otherwise he would have been most depressed.

He was a close friend of mine for over 50 years; he had a heart of gold.

When Helen and I were married, he presented us with an antique clock which kept good time.

I remarked to him once that he should consider marriage. His reply was "I have no wish to repeat the tragedy."

He was sentimental about Swanton Mill where his boyhood was spent. After a visit there in his later years, he wrote to me with the following verse:-

"Fair scenes of childhood's opening bloom
 For sportive youth to stray in
 For manhood to enjoy his strength
 And wear himself away in."

I sometimes felt that John cultivated old age. He used a quill pen in his office, sharpening it with a pen knife.

He continued many old customs which his father had. One was to keep a barrel of cider in his office, so when a customer came to pay an account, he would draw him a glass of the cider.

One day a waggoner came to the Mill with a load of corn just as all the men were at lunch, so John explained that the waggon could not be unloaded till the men returned.

John said, "Have you got something to eat?" "Yes, Mister, I have." John said, "Would you like a glass of cider with it?" "O Mister, that I would."

As John was going to lunch he asked the old man if he would like another glass - he replied, "I don't want to 'pose on good nature, but I should like another."

After lun h, John returned to his office, found the waggon had been unloaded but the old waggoner was sitting on the ground. John said, "So you are still here then."

"Yes, Mister. I never felt so happy in my life but I can't get up."

"Do you think you could drive the horses if we set you on the waggon?" "That I could Mister." So they set him in the waggon and he went merrily off.

John disliked many modern things. He disliked the telephone and said 'he would not mind having one if no-one rang him up.'

In the end his customers almost demanded that he should have it installed, so reluctantly asked the Post Office to see him about it.

A Post Office engineer called but before John entered into any arrangement he asked the man, "First of all, is it compulsory?" "Oh no, you are not forced to have it." John agreed to its being installed.

I have the following letter which he wrote me soon afterwards:-

"Dear Philip,

Dragons are not extinct. One paid us a visit this morning - green strident and evil smelling, it disgorged four fiends one of whom shinned up a telephone pole, another climbed up the ivy at the corner of our house, the other two like rats ignoring plinth and paint, bored holes through the walls of the Mill Office - like monster spiders they festooned the place with webs of copper wire.

They left at noon, I thought the worst was over. Unfortunately a lesser green reptile came at 1 o'clock, bearing two more sprites. They fixed an infernal instrument at 5 o'clock. The serenity of a century was broken for the first time.

Yours sincerely,

No. 211." ✱

John wished to keep his business small, he seemed horrified at the thought of a large business, which might

✱ John Russell's new telephone number!

have entailed the need for a Bank overdraft, which he disliked; he said, "I should create a Frankenstein I could not control."

He managed his business very well with simple old methods, and with utmost honesty and integrity which brought work to the Mill quite naturally - they were always busy.

He asked me once how it was Jack Prebble managed to keep his business small and compact.

One Tuesday he said to me, "We are very busy indeed, people seem determined to trade with us in spite of our efforts to prevent them."

When he decided to retire from business and Mr. Charles Lewis was about to join him, he asked Mr. Lewis one request, "Don't increase the business", which of course, was just what Charles Lewis intended to do.

When he visited our Mill, I am afraid he thought we were launching out too much by modernising our plant by putting in a high speed grinder. His remark was "This does not grind, it frightens the corn to pieces."

He had one man who was a very slow worker and John said, "if you move any slower you will come to a full stop."

John told him he had just the job for him, he could paint the Windmill and they would provide a suitable cradle and platform suspended from the cap by rope pulleys where he could sit and carry on painting. When John suggested this to him, the old man said, "Oh no Master, I could not do that, I might fall." John replied, "That would be the quickest thing you would have ever done in your life."

When he retired a few friends on the Corn Exchange thought it would be nice to mark the occasion with a dinner in his honour. This was arranged to be held at the Saracens Head Hotel, Ashford.

During the dinner, Mr. Wm. Harvey presented him with a silver tankard suitably inscribed and made a short speech with our best wishes, saying 'that though the tankard was so small it was overflowing with our goodwill.' In his reply thanking them for their good wishes, John said,

"You mention my career, the definition of which infers speed - my career has been a crawl. An uncle of mine said 'I should have done better if I had retired before I started!'" Much laughter.

After Mr. Lewis took his business over John was rather concerned at Mr. Lewis spending a lot of money on modern machinery and silos etc. John said to me one day, "We are spending all the money we haven't got."

His health was failing in his seventieth year and he spent much time in his chair in the new house he had built in the Mill field.

I went to see the new house which he described as a cross between a cow-shed and a mortuary.

I remarked on the number of cupboards in the house. "Yes", he said, "they are necessary to hold the family skeletons."

He became very ill in June 1958, when we were on holiday in France. On our return I at once went to see him in a Nursing Home at Capel near Maidstone. He did not know me though I sat with him for some time by his bedside.

He passed away a few days later - he was 70 years old.

I missed him greatly. I felt I had lost a brother. We lunched together each Tuesday after market, we spent many holidays together. He was a faithful and true friend for over 50 years.

JOHN RUSSELLJohn's Photographic Mind

He could repeat those things which he had read
(some only once).

How often he corrected me of any error I may
have made in say a date, or misquoted some historical
fact.

He could quote from memory a number of poems such
as that by Emily Brontëe as we walked over the Yorkshire
Moors when on holiday.

Emily Brontëe

First verse of her famous poem -

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-tossed sphere
I see Heaven's glories shine
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear.
