

CHAPTER 8: A WADENHOE ANTHOLOGY

Many of these poems have appeared in the Wadenhoe and Pilton District News, some have not been published before. Other sources are given where appropriate.

ANON *This rhyme appeared in the Northampton County Magazine (Vol. 4, p.23) in 1931. 'A. Milton, Wadenhoe' says that he well remembers his father repeating it to him when he was a child. His father (who died aged 80 in 1924) had known it from his boyhood. The late Ted Briggs also knew it. Can anyone explain why Wadenhoe is 'peevisish'? The OED gives the following definitions for 'peevisish': (1) silly, senseless, foolish, out-of-one's-senses; (2) spiteful, malignant, mischievous, harmful; (3) perverse, refractory, obstinate, self-willed; (4) morose, querulous, irritable, ill-tempered. Take your pick!*

A local rhyme Thorpe and Achurch stand in a row,
Lilford and Pilton and peevisish Wadenhoe,
Onicle [Aldwinkle] the Chronicle stands by the waterside,
Islip is nothing but malice and pride,
Thrapston, Whitehorse,
Titchmarsh, the Cross,
Clapton, the Clay,
Barnwell, King's Highway,
Armston, On the hill,
Polebrook, In the hole,
Ashton, Blows the bellows,
Oundle, Burns the coal.

THOMAS BELL *Extracts from a poem by the Barnwell poet, Thomas Bell (1783-1862), which appeared in his collection, The Rural Album, published in 1853.*

Wadenhoe Now whilst the length'ning shades of evening fall,
And shroud in gathering mist yon ivied wall;
And through the doubtful gloom of envious night
The shadowy distant spires appear in sight;
And rustling trees in sombre guise are seen
To wave their branches o'er the dewy green;
With measur'd steps, reluctant, sad and slow,
I leave thy fertile meadows, Wadenhoe;
Yet often turn again thy charms to view,
And bid thy sylvan scenes a fond adieu,
As lovers parting oft their steps retrace
T'enjoy another sweet and last embrace.
Plac'd on the sloping hill's romantic brow,
That throws a mass of deepen'd shade below,
Thy rustic church its humble head uprears,
An ag'd memorial of departed years,
Which silently our thoughts to heaven sends,
And to the landscape varied beauty lends....
But night advancing bids me haste away,
The warning gloom permits no longer stay.
Boldly the pheasant struts in conscious pride,
While hares and rabbits sport on every side.

The blue grey mists, at first but dimly seen,
 Now fast expanding hide the meadows green;
 The soaring herons their wat'ry paths forsake,
 And timid wild ducks seek the distant lake.
 O'er the still stream, outspreading far and wide,
 The chilling vapours roll from side to side;
 Like clouds on clouds they move, a boundless sea,
 O'ertopping distant church and hill and tree:
 An ocean vast, in which to fancy's eyes,
 Embattled tow'rs, and warlike castles rise,
 And mountain tops half hidden in the skies.

'G.W.' *'G.W.' was evidently in the circle of friends of the renowned ornithologist Lord Lilford of Lilford Hall, who owned property around Wadenhoe. This poem was written at Lilford, and is dated 1879 (source untraced).*

The Ballad of the Lynches

The Christmastide had passed away; the New Year had begun:
 'The Lynches must be shot today', cries Lilford's eldest son.
 The Lord of Lilford he had gone a-sailing on the main,
 And flies the Royal Squadron Flag adown the coast of Spain.
 His lady fair and sons at home - two gallant youths, I wot;
 And they have sworn a mighty oath, 'The Lynches must be shot'.
 Now summon forth the beaters, that they the woods may beat,
 And promise them a guerdon of bread, and ale, and meat.
 No matter though the woods be thick, the beater knows no fear:
 I trow they would do anything for glory and for beer.
 Forth troop they at the summons from all the country's side;
 From Achurch and from Pilton they march with honest pride,
 From Wigsthorpe's distant hamlet (where Nevitts all were born),
 Prepared to face the thickest brakes, and brave the sharpest thorn.
 'Come, look alive, you beaters!' it is the warning cry
 Of Jones, the great head keeper, from whom the poachers fly;
 A very small acquaintance with Northamptonshire he owns,
 Who does not know the voice and form of Mr Samuel Jones.
 Tight are the breeches of the youth who loves the fox to chase,
 And tight the garments worn by those who royal circles grace;
 But tighter far than such as these, by many a painful inch,
 The breeches worn by Jones the day on which they shoot the Lynch.
 A group of friends stand round him; but none such garments own:
 Donald (who comes from where such things are very near unknown) -
 Harvey, from Farming Woods, is there, a friendly face to show;
 Stout Dixey comes from Titchmarsh, Perkins from Wadenhoe;
 George Hollyce, who surveys the nets; and, radiant as a star,
 The purple nose of Nevitt scents luncheon from afar.
 And now the beaters stand in line as if 'twere for a race,
 And Mr Jones looks down to see if each is in his place.

From Oundle and from Thrapstone, the traveller, half afraid,
 With wonder hears the thunder of the distant cannonade;
 And the crafty poacher sighs to think that he and his good mate
 May pay a visit to the Lynch, but just a night too late.

Now fierce the combat rages, and valiant deeds are done,
 And each in turn destroys the foe with glorious feats of gun.
 'Twere hard to single out a name to trace on history's page,
 Amid that band of heroes of every size and age;
 Still must we speak of Burroughes, a man of Norfolk fame,
 Who 'fetched 'em down', as Jones observed, with more than mortal aim;
 Tom proved himself a worthy son of him now far away;
 And Mr John the spot was on through all that famous day;
 Still the red hat of Lyveden was foremost in the fight;
 And Hunt, of Wadenhoe, 'pulled them down' when almost out of sight.

And long as we may hope to live, still will the tale go round,
 Of how we shot the Lynches when the snow was on the ground.

'L' *The following poem was found tucked into the Game Book of George Eden Hunt (1859-92), signed 'L' and dated 'Aug. 6 1882, Dartmouth'. 'L' was almost certainly Lord Lilford (1833-96), Hunt's close friend and neighbour at Lilford Hall. Lilford spent July and August 1882 at Dartmouth aboard his steam-yacht 'Glowworm'.*

**So!
 Hunt of Wadenhoe's
 home again**

So! Hunt of Wadenhoe's home again
 Look out ye birds and fishes.
 Keep each your hole or bower or den
 Dont gratify his wishes.

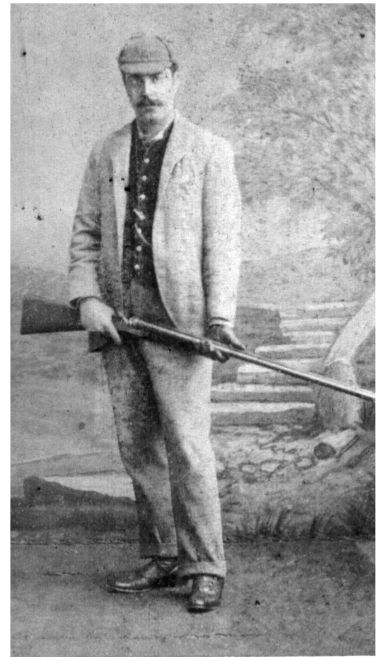
Thou cushat cooing from the Beech
 In summer's dewy morning
 Keep wide awake and out of reach
 And give your young 'uns warning.

Ye bream all flopping in the Nen
 And family of Roaches
 Keep well aloof from lures of men
 When Mr Hunt approaches.

Listen to me ye Leverets all
 And thou young perky rabbit
 I'm told that riddling you with ball
 Is George's common habit.

Thou blackbird and melodious thrush
 Wait till the weather hardens
 And if you value life one rush
 Avoid the Wadenhoe gardens.

Sweet is the gooseberry I ween
 The Currant and the Cherry
 And luscious slug comes well between
 Two courses of the berry.



George Eden Hunt
 1859-1892 (see Chapter 6)
 is the 'Hunt of Wadenhoe'
 referred to in this poem. He
 was an expert shot and spent
 70 days out of a possible
 135-day season, despatching
 the local game.

But when you leave your parents care
Fly to the fields and ditches
Find creeping things abundant there
But shun the gardener's riches.

Or sure as fate some day too soon
You'll rue your greed unwary
And feed some woeful afternoon
The Lilford aviary.

Nor deem that midst the leaves you're safe
For this young man of mettle
Keeps open eye for every waif
By Quincy weed or nettle.

Ye waterhens with jerking tails
Ducks splashy nooks frequenting
See that your caution never fails
Or leave your Ma's lamenting.

And then my late and early friend
Snipe with a probing bill
If thou wouldst shun a bloody end
Stick to the moory Hill.

Must I confess it fowls that fly
And fish with greedy gapes
In giving you these warnings I
Am crying - 'Sour Grapes'.

TREVOR HOLD *Trevor Hold has lived in Wadenhoe since 1970 and has published three volumes of poetry, the most recent of which is 'Mermaids and Nightingales'.*

Boys fishing

World and time have flown away.
These boys inhabit a magic world
Of waving waterweed and stones,
Of diving beetle and darting fish.
To them, the loach and stickleback
Are worth more than all the Pharoahs' treasure.

Home and school are a world away.
Armed with bandy-net and jar
They've trekked through many a field and copse
To reach this secret haven.
Now they pan its magic waters
And grin with pride as they show their hard-earned spoil.

Time and the world hang, for this precious moment,
Suspended in a grimy jar.

Ernie's path *Ernie was the beloved Estate stone mason and man-of-all-trades in Wadenhoe during the 1940s-1980s*

Like the man himself
it ambles leisurely,
curling this, then that way
over the green
from cottage gate
to road.

Quite clearly defined
all the year round.
Even in high summer
you see it wind like a snake
beneath keck and tall grasses.
Boots and weather
have hollowed it deep,
four times a day,
year in, year out,
rain, sun, snow and wind.

Just like the man himself,
as personal as a thumb-print.
Others may walk it
but none may claim it.
How many have a memorial
so perfectly achieved,
so clearly laid out for all to see?



Butcher Brown *Mr Brown was one of two butchers who paid weekly visits to Wadenhoe to sell meat from the 1930s-1981*

At the hoot of his horn
the cats come running
from nook and cranny,
haybarn and nettlebed.

Dogs, alert
minutes before
he arrives, whimper
and scratch at the door.

Ripe from the pub,
snuffling of beer,
he calls his minions,
stroking the favoured one,

And as he waddles down
the path, like a royal
walrus, his train
of admiring courtiers

regard him with awe:
Sausage Maker - Supplier
of Prime Pickled Tongues -
God of the Juicy Bone.

**Ted Briggs explains
bell-ringing**

Ted was born in Wadenhoe in 1903 and was Tower Captain from 1942 to the 1970s.

‘Turn treble from behind,
dodge 3-4 down,
pass treble 2-3
dodge 3-4 up.
Do you see it?’
No, I don’t: as obscure
as mustard.
To Ted, of course, clear as a bell.
‘Can we start again?’

‘Turn treble from behind,
dodge 3-4 down...’
and through it all he goes once more.
‘See?’ No, I don’t.
‘And you an educated man!
Let’s start again.
I’ll draw it for you.’

And he draws an intricate diagram:
1-2-3-4-5,
like snakes-and-ladders.
‘Follow that bell through...’
But the more he tries to explain
the more confused I become:
I’m looking at an inscrutable map.
What’s more he knows *I* know he knows
(and *he* knows that I know he knows)
that words will never bridge the gap.

Roy the milkman

Roy Sumner brought cheer to the village delivering milk to almost all Wadenhoe’s residents for 42 years, from 1953 to 1995.

‘She was so sweet and charming...’
‘Come into my arms again...’
Perched on his dray like a knight-errant,
Roy the milkman enters the village
singing the old music-hall ballads,
the songs his father taught him,
‘I heard a mavis singing...’
a permanently switched-on radio.

Broadly grinning like a laxton pippin
he croons the hits of fifty years ago,
‘Hi! hi! he shall die...’
‘Where my caravan has rested...’
clinking bottles for accompaniment
‘You are my heart’s delight...’
as he marches down the garden
to deliver the daily pint.

**Joan,
the Wadenhoe
donkey**

This poem was read at the Achurch Children's Service, Christmas Eve 1996, when Joan herself was present.

Alas! poor Joan, those ears! - as if
you hadn't already a cross to bear -
one stuck up, the other down,
the right one looking all skewiff,
the left one rising solitary in air.

What do they symbolise? I'm not quite sure:
something religiously profound perhaps,
a parable of earth and heaven?
a half-way railway signal saying
'Proceed with caution'?
or just the letter L in semaphore?



I sometimes wonder if your mournful call
is not exasperation at your lot,
a cry of anguish for two ears askew,
a heartfelt prayer to be symmetrical
(though probably it's more mundane -
impatience at not being attended to!).

Take heart, dear Joan; all's not uneven.
Forgive our mocking words and foolish laughter.
Instead, say to yourself, 'My strident brays
are just a donkey's way to sing God's praise.
My ears, one trained to earth, the other heaven,
are pointing out our paths to the hereafter.'

The ghost village

Here in the churchyard, high above the houses,
The dearly beloved, who once worked side by side
In the fields,
Exchanged their gossip at the local pub,
Celebrated fete and jubilee,
Are gathered together, mute, silent neighbours now.
All thoughts are left unspoken,
Their worldly wisdom compressed to bald 'Hic Jacets'
Cut like cryptic telegrams on cold grey stone.

Alec *Alec Setchfield was a familiar figure in Wadenhoe from the 1970s to his death in 1991, living on his boat, the last one 'Rambler II', at the bottom of Church Hill. He would have relished his funeral: the coffin, his war service medals (including the Arctic Service Medal and the North Russia Club Commemoration Medal) gleaming, was carried up the hill which he had climbed daily to open the church door. A packed Church sang 'Eternal Father, strong to save' and heard Tennyson's moving poem, 'Crossing the Bar'. A naval bugler sounded the Last Post as the coffin was lowered. Afterwards the mourners were invited back to the Kings Head for a final 'toast'.*



Blinking like a mole
he emerges from his dank boat-home
into the sunlight,
a hobbit of a man
in donkey-coat and bobble-cap,
no more affluent than a watervole.

Twitching with palsy,
smelling of paraffin,
he speaks in short staccato bursts,
sentences tapped through teeth in curt morse-code,
quite heedless of the weather
as he hobbles resolutely up the road.

JOHN PARKER *John Parker lives in Cumbria and a visit to friends in Wadenhoe inspired him to write this poem.*

Wadenhoe Quiet runs the gentle Nene
Under morning mists across the fields.
The pace of flow is not perceived,
So slow it is;
Betrayed by yellow floating leaves
Slipped from autumn's trees which stand
On limestone scarp and greeny leas.
Thus does the water make its way,
Day after day, meandering around
Those village churches found
At Aldwinckle, Thorpe Waterville to Achurch
By way of Wadenhoe's feet. Wadenhoe;
With a dead-end street!
And very old church on a little hill;
Land anciently occupied by the living,
Now by the uncommunicating dead;
Known only by weathered leaning stones
Beautifully lettered, there to be read.
But no weeping now over their bones;
Where wildflowers grow and the bee drones.
Some lichen'd tombstone carries the face
Of wing headed Hypnos:
He of the deep and peaceful sleep,
So very appropriate in this place
Above the gentle river
And morning mists across the fields.

JANE REYNOLDS *Jane spent her childhood in Wadenhoe during the 1970s-1980s.
(Had she, we wonder, been reading Shakespeare's 'A Midsummer
Night's Dream' when she wrote this?).*

**Talk with a stone
wall** O Wall, why didst thou fall,
Ill-fated wall?
And cause those tourists all
To call,
'What happened to your wall?'

Wall: What with the frost and moles and all
There wasn't a lot to do 'cept fall.

PETER TURNER *Peter Turner lives in Norfolk and makes frequent visits to his fisherman son in Wadenhoe*

The river village The river flows along through the valley,
The village looks over its water meadows,
The church with a view over all,
The bells echoing down the ages
And across to Achurch's fine spire.

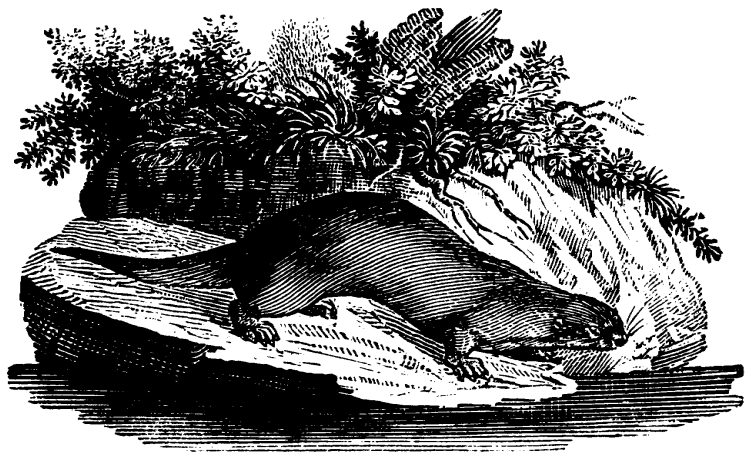
Peter leads the horse up the Hill,
The Donkeys look out over the gate;
Apples and sugar lumps are acceptable
But some good hay is more so
And a pat and a word helps to make friends.

David keeps watch as does the Heron.
He has his rod; the pike will feel his hook,
The Trout are in his care and he knows their ways,
And which lure will bring them to the net
When we try our skill on Summer days.

The Hunt meets at the head of the valley
Reynard in his pheasant domain
Looks out from the wooded hill
And is ready for the chase
To lead the hounds a dance and the riders a good jolly.

Somewhere by the river four churches can be seen;
I'm told this can be beaten elsewhere.
The river has no parish boundaries;
Flowing past the spires and towers
To meet the tide and the open sea.

The Kingfisher knows our river,
As does the Woodpecker our woods,
Both brightening winter days.
Others more hidden: Brock the Badger
And the secret Otter? Yes, they may be there!



Wood engraving
by Thomas Bewick

**Church Hill,
Wadenhoe**

Through the aeons of time it has stood,
this emerald hill, crowned with its house of God,
'neath which, forgotten pagan rites
hold their dark secrets in each earthy sod.
And was a castle really there?
its ramparts grass grown into shapely mounds,
and did the Roman Legions march
along the river valley's marshy ground?
Who knows what history is written here,
this beauteous spot, which god and man combined
to make a heritage for those,
who, in this place, true peace and joy have found.

The old mill

The passing years would have left it there,
with the swallows nesting beneath its eaves,
growing gracefully older year by year,
guarding the water where it leaves
the flow of the mill race, dark and cool,
eddyng out to the red banked pool.

There was solace there for the weary mind,
a tranquil peace for the troubled soul,
when the meadowsweet scented the summer air,
and the flashing minnows the shallows sought,
and the voices of children playing there
echoed the skills their parents taught.
Ghosts of the generations past
making sure that these scenes may last.

Now chimneys adorn the old stone roof,
new windows stare from the ancient sides,
telling the world beyond all proof
that's here where a family now resides.
Gone are the millstones, gone the race,
gone is the heart of this once loved place.



Drawing: Sue Hold

**A sense of place
(The Old Rectory)**

I dreamt I was a little child again
Playing 'neath the sombre green yew-tree
That spread its darkened shadow on the grass,
A very private place it was for me.

Beyond the wide and sweeping sloping lawns,
Joe, the gardener, trundled up and down,
Leaving a stripey pattern on the sward
Where the mower's whirring blades the grass had mown.

A hammock swung beneath the tree's low boughs,
A stringy thing of hard and knotted twine,
And in its yielding folds I'd gently swing
And close my eyes, and feel the world was mine.

And in the hot and lazy summer days,
The sound of tennis balls against a net
Spoke of my mother playing on the court,
And voices calling out for 'game and set'.

And hidden by a high hedge clipped and neat,
I'd listen for the scrunch of wheels upon the drive,
And peering quietly through the narrow leaves
I'd watch the family's special guests arrive.

* * * * *

I woke, and found myself advanced in age
And sleeping in the room that once knew Joe,
But from the recessed window in the eaves
I see again the home I used to know.

My tree still stands, an ageless, timeless thing,
No longer needed by a generation past,
Forgotten in its hidden corner of the drive,
No hammock now, no swinging shadows cast.

Time has erased the clues of childhood gone
But memory stays, and memories linger on.



Mrs Julyan's shop

A wondrous place it was for me
a small child with a penny.
'Oh Mrs Julyan have you got
some Licquorish Lace, or any
Lollipops on sticks, or sherbet sweet?'
Wrapped in a paper twist
so workmanlike and neat.

There was the smell of 'baccy'
for the old men's evening pipe,
and dark smoky sides of bacon
that hung by onions ripe.
There were needles in their packets,
cotton reels, and wool of varied hues,
and black and brown shoe laces
for the villagers' best shoes.

Black stockings for the parlour maids,
ingredients for the cooks,
and little drawers of odds and ends
and things that hung on hooks.
No matter what one asked for,
it would be there next day,
for Mrs Julyan's motto was
'to turn no one away'.



Requiem for a village

Our village is changing,
the old times have gone.
They say it is progress
and time marches on.
Gone are the farmsteads,
the stackyards, and byres,
the warm smell of stables
that housed the big shires.
No jingle of harness,
no rattling of chains,
now shatter the silence
as they plod up the lanes.
The ring of the anvil,
The village shop's bell,
are now but a memory,
and who could foretell
that houses now stand
where the bullock yards stood,
and children no longer
gather flowers from the wood?

