THE *NEW* GLADSTONE REVIEW

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Informal commentary, opinions, reviews, news, illustrations and poetry for bookish people of philanthropic inclination

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Contents

EDITORIAL

A large gap in the due publication of this Review (six months) is explained by my being engrossed in other writing, so I am most grateful to a correspondent who, contacting me about an entirely different matter, referred favourably to a piece I had written on Southwell which is displayed on the Civic Society website. I had completely forgotten about it, and on discovering that it was written about 15 years ago I resolved to reproduce it in this issue. And having got the ball rolling I was encouraged to get the rest of the issue compiled as soon as possible.

The result is that, not wanting to bother other possible contributors at short notice, this issue has been kept 'in the family,' with my son Jim helping out by allowing me to use an article of his recently published in a philosophy magazine. I think it's a neat example of his experience in introducing philosophical ways of thinking to people interested in, but unfamiliar with, them.

Other pieces are on a prominent medical scientist, who made important advances in the science of epidemiology, despite impediments to her progress from a very male-dominated medical profession; an account of the unique open-field agricultural system which has been practised since the middle ages in the Nottinghamshire village of Laxton; a random selection of eponyms in what I am calling the *word, word, word* series and, what might be called, an *advertisement* on behalf of Gladstone Books. An Addendum about plankton shows a beautiful illustration from 1904 and a remarkable comment on its crucial importance for life on Earth. The Review was started as an attempt to encourage interest in the books offered for sale, but it seems that the tail now wags the dog.

Good wishes to all my customers and readers. At least there is some hope that politics in the USA will escape from the gloom-ridden scenarios that have dominated the scene until lately.

BM

1. PHILOSOPHERS EXPLORING THE GOOD LIFE

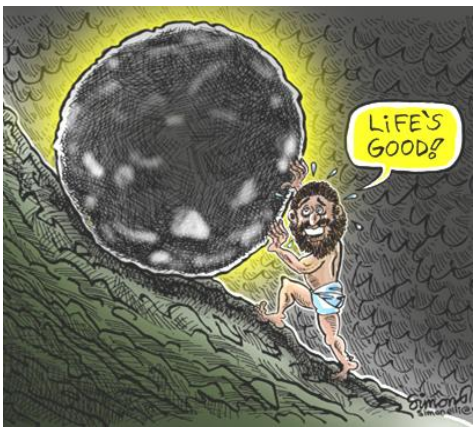
Based on an article by Jim Mepham published in *Philosophy Now* 162 (2024) pp. 8-10

Recently, I have attended a number of funerals and it has got me thinking. Imagine after you've died, your loved ones are sitting around, reminiscing about your life. What might they be saying about you? How will you be remembered? Did you have a good life? Well, how would they know? And what constitutes a good life, anyway?

The first thing to consider about what makes a life 'good', is whether the value of a life is determined by the liver of that life or by others. Suppose that your last thought before you died was that you had had an excellent life, but when your loved ones sit around and discuss you, they all decide that your life was awful. Is that possible? Could they be right about your life, and you be wrong? Or what if everyone else thinks your life was amazing, but you die miserable, feeling that your life was a total waste? Who would be right? And which of these two options would you prefer, anyway?

Ethics involve asking these deep questions about values. Other ethical questions include: Are you living the way you think you should? Are you working toward goals you actually care about? How important are these things to you? Right now, the choices you make about the way you spend your time are shaping the type of life you'll live.

For the ancient Greek father of Western ethics, Socrates, "the unexamined life is not worth living." For him, our life's work (his idea of a good life) is to question one's thinking rationally, and so to 'know thyself' through a relentless spirit of philosophical enquiry and dialogue with others.



Writing in the twentieth century, the French existentialist Albert Camus recounted the ancient Greek myth of Sisyphus, who was condemned by Zeus to roll a boulder up a mountain everyday forever. Each time he reached the top, the boulder would roll back down, then Sisyphus would have to start all over again. This was the entirety of his existence. He couldn't do anything else. It was up and down the hill, in a never-ending cycle. Strangely, Camus wrote, "We must imagine Sisyphus happy." Why? As an absurdist, Camus thought that each of us is like Sisyphus, in that nothing that any of us does is inherently important, because life just doesn't have any inherent meaning. We're all just rolling boulders up our particular hills. We can, however, choose to *give* meaning to what we do. After all, for the existentialists, we decide what to value, so when we throw ourselves into a task, it becomes filled with meaning – a meaning we give it.

I find this account of Sisyphus depressing because, on the one hand, it's saying that nothing you do matters, but on the other hand, it's saying that anything that you do matters, provided you choose to imbue it with value: become a doctor and save lives; be a stay-at-home parent and look after children; create beautiful art works; find a career that gives you the space in your life to pursue a hobby you like; volunteer your time to promote a cause you care about; or just learn card tricks. In a sense it doesn't matter what you do, what matters is that it's meaningful for you. Basically, existentialists tell us that our lives and our meanings are in our own hands. So, if you're unhappy, you should change your life. Do you agree with them?

In his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (1974), the American philosopher Robert Nozick asked us to imagine that scientists have developed the ultimate innovation in virtual reality, known as the Experience Machine. (We may not be too far away from this invention!) The Machine allows you to have any experience you like, for as long as you like – for an hour, a day, two years, even for the rest of your life, perhaps. Your body will rest comfortably, tended by nurses, and nourished through feeding tubes. Meanwhile, your mind will experience the best your imagination has to offer. You can achieve the fame and fortune you've always wanted, cure cancer, or heroically climb mountains – whatever you choose. However, Nozick sets the situation up so that you'll forget you're wired to the Machine, and the simulation is so complete that while you're in it you'll be convinced that these experiences are really happening. It will all feel as real as the experiences you're having right now, and there will be no way to tell you're in a simulation. Sounds great, doesn't it?

Next Nozick gives you a choice of either an entire life inside the Machine or life outside it. He set the thought experiment up this way to ask whether pleasure really is the only thing we desire, since while in the Machine a person can have as much pleasure as they can imagine. But Nozick himself had no interest in entering the Machine for life, and he thought most of us wouldn't either, just because the experiences it gives us don't correspond with reality. So even though you might feel you're having meaningful relationships inside the Machine, in the real world, you're lying on a bed having simulated experiences of being with non-existent people. Nozick concluded that *truth* is a value to us not superseded by pleasure.

If having an actual impact on the real world is important to you, that's one thing the Experience Machine wouldn't be able to give you. However, if you're a hedonist – a person who believes 'the good' is equal to 'the pleasurable' – then simply having whatever pleasurable experiences you desire is what you most want. In that case, it might then be hard to see why you shouldn't enter the Experience Machine. After all, it would let you experience things you could never have experienced otherwise.

Aristotle, like his philosophical progenitor Socrates, had a clear idea of what a life well lived would be like. He wouldn't agree with Camus that we must make our own meaning, nor that there are infinite ways to live a good life; and he wouldn't endorse the use of the Experience Machine. Rather, he described the good life as a life of *flourishing*, in which a person is constantly striving for self-improvement – to be more virtuous, morewise, more thoughtful, and more self-aware. Aristotle

believed in a human essence, which implies that there's a proper way to be a human being, and live a human life, and that we'll only flourish by finding that path. Aristotle defined humans as 'rational animals', so living a good human life means seeking to know your world, know yourself, and strive to govern yourself through reason. Generally, you should work to be the best, most virtuous version of yourself. But is this goal realistic? And can people who are suffering poverty, war, or torture then ever be said to have good lives?

For Aristotle, some ways of living are definitely better or worse than others. So if you want to be a good person living a good life, what you prefer has nothing to do with it. Choosing to just smoke pot all day, every day, or more generally, to simply indulge one's pleasures, said Aristotle, is to live a bad life. This stands in stark contrast to the view we get from Camus, who said that we are all the determiners of our own values, and hence of the value of our own lives. So we have two contrasting views of 'the good life' here: one from a philosopher from ancient Greece, and one from twentieth century France. Which do you think is closer to the truth?

There is indeed a rich set of ethical ideas and disagreements about the good life, from many different philosophers throughout history. Other philosophers, from the Stoics and Epicurus onwards, can also illuminate our ideas on meaning, happiness, our obligations to others, our relationships, goals, love, and dealing with adversity and mortality. Existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Søren Kierkegaard, or Simone de Beauvoir will develop our understanding of subjectivity, freedom, and authenticity. And there are, of course, many modern thinkers who can expand, question, or illuminate our thinking here. 'What is the good life?' is, after all, one of the oldest philosophical questions. But is it a question about a *moral* life, a life of pleasure, a question of meaning, or is it about self-development and self-actualisation?

One of the values of philosophy is that it encourages us to think for ourselves, including about the nature of a good life. For Simon Blackburn, in his book *Think* (2001), philosophical awakening "enables us to step back, to see our perspective on a situation as perhaps distorted or blind, at the very least to see if there is argument for preferring our ways, or whether it is just subjective." And for Bertrand Russell in *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912), there may be no definite philosophical answer to the question of whether, at the end of one's life, one can say one has led a good life. Instead, "philosophy is to be studied not for the sake of any definite answers to its questions since no definite answers can, as a rule, be known to be true, but rather because these questions enlarge our conception of what is possible, enrich our intellectual imagination and diminish the dogmatic assurance which closes the mind against speculation." So doing philosophy may well be part of a good life. Do you agree*?* BM

Jim Mepham, a retired head teacher who lives in Bristol, runs a number of philosophy groups, including those in the University of the Third Age, Bristol Pub Philosophy and adult education workshops on Philosophy for Everyday Life. Several of his articles have been published in earlier issues of the Gladstone Review.

2. SOUTHWELL: A SPECIAL PLACE

A RAMBLER'S REFLECTIONS: BY DUMBLE, DYKE AND WONG

Visitors to Southwell are often regaled with tales of yore that celebrate its notable history: a king's last night of freedom, the jaundiced reflections of a budding poet or hints of a Roman temple. But for this habitual walker the delights are less obvious, although certainly no less captivating. For Southwell abounds in serendipitous discoveries: little known haunts that stir largely forgotten memories, or views that elicit unexpected reverie. Here are just a few.

Sometimes, crossing the bridge over Westhorpe Dumble, when the morning sun is struggling to penetrate the trees' dense canopy, the serene majesty of the scene can transport you to the set of *A Midsummer Nights Dream,* in that hushed expectant moment before the actors enter. Or taking the path through the meadow to the north of Shady Lane leaves you feeling you are lost in deep country, although Burgage Lane lies hidden, only a few yards away. Or walking over fields off Crink Lane, you discover a pond alive with dragonflies.

But Southwell's civic past is never far from view. Who can fail to be enchanted when first coming across the silk mill at Maythorne, complete with the workers' lodgings? Or the stately Caudwell's Mill, beneath which the water's rush reminds us of the way the Victorians harnessed 'green' energy. Sometimes you need to look a little more carefully – to discern the clues to the old brewmaster's house, or the blacksmith's forge in the Queen Street opticians. And a little background knowledge can fuel the imagination – of the evocative echoes of the puffing Southwell Paddy engine on its single track journey to Rolleston Junction (along what is now the Southwell Trail) before Dr Beeching did his worst; or of the groans of prisoners on the treadmill, behind the facade of the former gaol on Burgage Green; or even of the sounds of the grim routines of the Workhouse, where old and young, and husbands and wives harshly consigned to their separate quarters, eked out a bleak existence.

The past is, indeed, always close to hand: and the Civic Society's aim is to ensure that inevitable progress (which undoubtedly benefits us all) does not destroy the memory of the town's unique history. Just think of a few examples: here George Bernard Shaw visits the old theatre in Queen Street (now given a new lease of life); John Betjeman delights in the town's congenial character; while here is a white-haired lad (the albino Robert Lowe) attending a local dame school, who later became Gladstone's brilliant, if highly reactionary, Chancellor of the Exchequer. Few such small places contain so rich a heritage.

But not all that excites is old. The well-designed arboretum next to the river Greet, the recent installation of sturdy kissing gates on footpaths, informative blue plaques on notable buildings (albeit, for some of us, a bit too small to read!), the informative nature lecterns dotted across the town and Brackenhurst Estate – all add to a rambler's pleasure.

For all its noted grandeur, that brings thousands to view the minster, and many to hear music and poetry from some of the country's most noted artists, Southwell also wears its mundane history like an old coat – comfortably and unpretentiously. You'll be hard pressed to discover the meanings of *dumble* or *wong* in a standard dictionary, but here you can walk beside or over them, and saunter at will through the incomparable Potwell Dyke Meadow. This is, indeed, a special place.

This article first appeared on the Southwell Civic Society website about 15 years ago. B M

3. JANET LANE-CLAYPON (1877-1967)

Distinguished medical scientist from Lincolnshire

Earlier this year**,** I was invited to give some lectures to students in the psychology department at Lincoln University. Over the years of my 'retirement,' I had been a visiting professor there contributing to courses in politics and biological sciences, but I hadn't realised just how much the site, conveniently near the railway station, had been developed since my previous visit, that is, before the Covid 19 epidemic, which had cancelled many face-to-face lectures. Fortunately, despite being now in my 85th year, and anxious I might be a bit 'rusty,' I dropped into my familiar style easily, and had some rewarding feedback. On the way back to the station, the name on a new building caught my eye, but my host couldn't tell me who or why the name was emblazoned so prominently on the building. I didn't know *why*, but I was sure I knew *who* it was. To confirm this, when I got home I went straight to my study and took a book off the shelves by the self-same-person.[1]

In a period when the medical profession was dominated by men, Janet Lane-Claypon was one of the founders of epidemiology in this country, and a pioneer in the statistical methods used in that branch of medicine. She was born in Boston, Lincolnshire (hence the local interest) to Edith and William, who was a wealthy banker and magistrate, and she was home-educated.

When 22 years old, she entered the physiology department at University College London (my own *alma mater* and the first English university to admit women), and graduating with a first class degree (and associated gold medal) in 1898, she soon went on to earn both PhD and MD degrees. Finishing all her studies with distinction, she joined the staff at the Lister Institute of Preventive Medicine, where she began her research on the bacteriology and biochemistry of milk - which happens to be the same field in which I was awarded my PhD degree about 60years later!

University College London

Of her significant discoveries, one was the importance of heating milk to destroy bacterial contamination, which was a common and pernicious drawback of drinking milk in the era before pasteurisation. She also established that appropriate heating did not destroy the nutritive value of milk. Undoubtedly, she was a rare, but highly effective, laboratory scientist at a time when women were often regarded as incapable of pursuing objective studies.

She also conducted important work involving weight gain in babies who were breastfed and those receiving boiled cows' milk. Typical results showed that for up to 208 days of life breastfed babies gained more weight than those receiving boiled milk, her analysis of the data being thoroughly analysed for confounding variables, like sampling errors, other food fed to

[1] Lane-Claypon J E (1916) *Milk and its Hygienic Relations* Longmans, Green & Co (348 pp)

the babies and the social class of different families. Lane-Claypon concluded her report with the statement, "*The evidence dealt with throughout this report emphasizes very forcibly the importance of breast-feeding for the young of all species and shows the special importance of breast-feeding during the early weeks of life.*[2] This conclusion, which has been endorsed many times since, and on the basis of far more data, is also part of the field of my own scientific enquiries.

Following this strictly scientific phase of her research, in 1912 she became a lecturer at Kings College for Women in London, in the same year was appointed Assistant Medical Inspector of the London Government Board and was commissioned by the Medical Research Council to write a book on infant feeding - recognition of her prominence in this field of medicine.

The breast, and more generally the mammary glands of all mammals, is a hot bed of biochemical interest, because it is the site of the synthesis of nutrients in the form of a wide range of proteins, carbohydrates and fats as well as a host of micronutrients, immune proteins and vitamins. Evolutionary processes have ensured milk's ability to effectively feed the infant and protect it from diseases by the subtle regulation exerted on mammary cells by numerous hormones (e.g. prolactin, corticosteroids and oxytocin) - with the result that babies can grow and prosper on milk alone for years. This is illustrated by central African hunter-gatherer tribes in which newborn babies are suckled for years without any supplementation with solids. Such fascinating biological properties were what led me to undertake my research for a PhD at a Cambridge research institute 63 years ago - mirroring (although I was unaware of it at the time) Lane-Claypon's similar fascination with lactation as a process vital for the survival of *Homo Sapiens* when no alternatives were available.

Regrettably, there is a downside to the physiological processes in mammary tissue, when they become diverted to pathology, as in breast cancer. As ever, sensitive to practical measures to alleviate medical problems, Lane-Claypon, resigned from her lectureship at Kings College in order to become an Investigation Officer in the newly-established Ministry of Health Cancer Committee, where she was soon commissioned to write a review on the surgical treatment of breast cancer. Unsurprisingly, her *Report on the Cancer of the Breast and its Associated Antecedents* (1926) was soon regarded as a landmark of the field. Subsequently (1928), she published a further report, which contained results of her own extensive research, and is *today considered to be the first case-controlled study, containing the first published epidemiologic questionnaire.*[2]

There is, however, a startling and depressing denouement to this story of a highly talented woman's extraordinary contribution to medical science at a time when male domination brooked no challenges. Janet had a long term relationship with Sir Edward Forber, and they decided to marry in 1929, when she was 52. But, at the time, established protocol demanded that, as a woman, she should resign from her scientific and advisory roles -and become a housewife! They moved to a Sussex village, where she led a quiet domestic life and died in 1967 at the age of 90 years.

No further comment necessary!

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[2] W Winkelstein (2004) *Vignettes in the History of Epidemiology: three firsts by Janet Elizabeth Lane-Claypon* American Journal of Epidemiology 160, 97-101

4. A RANDOM SELECTION OF EPONYMS

Continuing the *WORDS, WORDS, WORDS* series

Eponyms refer to people whose names are used in words associated with them, such as ***sandwich*** and ***wellington***. Some also come from literary, biblical or mythological sources

DUNCE: describes a person who is regarded as stupid or a slow learner. It is derived from the Scottish theologian ***John Duns Scotus*** (1265-1308), who, as a Franciscan, taught elements of Aristotle's and Augustine's doctrines, but was opposed to those of St Thomas Aquinas. This was ridiculed by 16th century humanists and reformers, who considered followers of Duns Scotus to be backward in accepting new ideas. The name *dunce*, then came to refer to anyone resisting new ideas, as dull or stupid.

MARSHALL PLAN: officially known as the European Recovery Programme, it was the programme of US economic aid to Europe after the Second World War. It was named after the US general and statesman. ***George Catlett Marshall*** (1880-1959), who originally proposed it and was Secretary of State (1947-9). For this work he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1953.

HANSARD: This is the official verbatim report of debates in the UK Houses of Parliament. They are called after the London printer ***Luke Hansard*** (1752-1858), who printed the *Journal of the House of Commons* from 1774. His son and members of the family continued this role up until the end of the 19th century. Although now printed by HM Stationery Office, it is still known as Hansard.

JCB: The trademark for a type of mechanical-earth mover. The initials refer to ***Joseph Cyril Bamford*** (1916-2001). A skilled welder and fitter, Bamford built a farm trailer using materials surplus to war use in 1945. Various other systems were then developed, and by the 1950s hydraulics were introduced in tipping trailers and loaders.

MALAPROPISM: is an instance of the unintentional confusion of words that produces a ridiculous effect. The word comes from the name of the character ***Mrs Malaprop*** in the play the *The Rivals* (1775) by the Irish dramatist Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Her name is derived from the French *mal a propos,* meaning *inappropriate.* An example is: *under the influence of alcohol and teutonic ulcers*.

CALAMINE: A pink powder, consisting of a mixture of zinc and ferric oxides, which is used to relieve itchiness and pain in the skin caused by insect bites, poisonous plants etc. The Latin word derives from the Greek ***Cadmus***, the legendary founder of Thebes, and ***kadameia***- which means *earth*.

HOTSPUR: this refers to a rash or fiery person, originally applied to the English rebel *Sir Henry Percy* (1364-1403), who was known as ***Harry Hotspur***. Impetuous and headstrong (hence the nickname), he was killed in the battle of Shrewsbury. Shakespeare used the name to signify the fearless character of Hotspur in *Richard II* and *Henry IV*.

CROCKFORD: is the name often used to refer to Crockford's Clerical Directory, a reference book first published in 1860, which gives facts about Church of England clergy. It is named after ***John Crockford*** (1823-1865), who was the management clerk to the sergeant at law Edward Cox, who first published the Directory, and preferred to use his clerk's name because of his own official position.

BLOOMERS: This women's garment took its name from women's rights activist ***Amelia Bloomer***. They are a type of underwear developed in the mid-19th century as a more healthy and comfortable alternative to the usual undergarments at the time. They became a symbol of women's rights in the 1850s.

MESMERIZE The term comes from the physician ***Franz Mesmer*** (1734-1815) who established a theory of energy transference between all animate and inanimate things called "animal magnetism." This led to coining of the term mesmerism to describe the phenomenon.

SIDEBURNS: The term was inspired by ***Ambrose Burnside*** (1824-1881***),*** an American railroad executive, soldier, inventor, industrialist, and politician - on account of his distinctive facial hair style.

CRAVAT: A silk or fine wool scarf worn by men. The first were worn by *Croatian mercenaries* serving in France in the Thirty Year's War (1618-1648). Some in fashionable French society were so impressed with the style that they adopted it and called it after the name of the mercenaries, i.e. ***Hrvat***

PARKINSON'S LAW: This states (especially for office work) that *work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion.* It was formulated in 1955 by ***Cyril Northcote Parkinson*** (1909-1993), a naval historian who wrote over 60 books. Another of his many 'laws' was the ***law of triviality***: *the time spent on any item on the agenda will be in inverse proportion to the sum involved.*

LOGANBERRY: This fruit is a cross between a blackberry and raspberry. It is named after an American court judge ***James Harvey Logan*** (1841- 1928), who mistakenly grew this berry hybrid when trying to create a superior blackberry.

HIPPOCRATIC OATH: The oath, taken by a doctor before beginning medical practise, comprises a code of medical ethics. It is named after the Greek physician ***Hippocrates*** (c.460-377 BC) who is commonly regarded as the 'father of medicine.'

WISTERIA: This is a genus of climbing flowering plants in the legume family. It was named after the American professor of anatomy ***Caspar Wistar*** (1761-1818), the son of a well-known glass-maker. It was an error by Thomas Nuttal, the curator of the botanical garden at Harvard University in 1818, that resulted in the misspelling of Wistar's surname in designating the plant as *wisteria*.

SAXOPHONE: This keyed woodwind instrument with a brass body and single-reed mouthpiece is named after its inventor - the Belgian musical instrument-maker ***Adolph Sax*** (1814-1894). The instrument was first shown to the public in 1844, and enjoyed much success, with composers such as Berlioz and Bizet composing music for it.

PROCRUSTIAN: is named after ***Procrustes***, a robber in Greek mythology who forced his victims to lie on a bed. If they were too tall, he would lop off their limbs, and if too short, stretch them to the length necessary to fit the bed. *Procrustian* has come to describe something designed to enforce or produce conformity by violent or arbitrary methods.

MORSE CODE: A telegraphic system of signalling in which letters and numbers are represented by dots and dashes. It was named after ***Finley Breese Morse*** (1791-1872***)***, an American artist and inventor, who exhibited paintings in the Royal Academy and enjoyed a high reputation as a portrait painter.

RUBIK'S CUBE: A puzzle invented by Hungarian ***Erno Rubik*** (b. 1944) consisting of a cube, each face of which is divided into nine small squares that can rotate around a central square. The aim is to rotate the squares on the cube such that the whole of each face shows one colour only. Originally designed for students it became a craze all over the world. The total number of positions that can be reached on the cube is (apparently) 43,252,003,274,489, 856,000.

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Information sources: M Manser(1988) *Dictionary of Eponyms* BCA & various web sites

5. LAXTON

A Medieval Village in our Midst

Southwell, the small cathedral town which is the home of Gladstone Books, is a place which rarely hits the headlines: few people outside the immediate vicinity seem aware of its existence. Yet for residents and visitors it is a place with a pleasantly distinctive character, in large measure due to the imposing 12th century Minster and the town's congenial ambience. My article *Southwell: a special place* in this issue suggests that it also has many hidden features only revealed by closer familiarity. And even a short distance outside the town one can often come across other moving experiences.

One such is Laxton, a village about ten miles to the north, with barely more than two hundred residents, who are custodians of a unique agricultural heritage - an open field system which in essence retains the practices which date from medieval times. There is evidence, based on the discovery of bones, pottery and coins, that in Laxton, sometimes also known as Lexington, the Romans built a farmstead in what is now the West field. There is also evidence that later there was a settlement on the site, and The Domesday Book, completed in the 11th century, records an adult population of 35-120 people living in the village - not so different from now.

Although in Laxton parish today, there's much conventionally-farmed land, a substantial area of the open field system is still farmed as in medieval times. In 1635 the open fields occupied 1,894 acres, which were divided into 2,280 strips, whereas now it covers only about a quarter of the original area, and there are only 164 strips: but the latter are much larger than the original strips. Despite these changes, the essential feature is that the land in these fields is still divided into many strips and farmed collectively by all the landowners

There are three open fields in the current system, called the Millfield, South field and West field, which are all much smaller than in medieval times, a fact which is revealed by the map produced by Mark Pierce in 1635, which is preserved in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. At that time there was also a fourth field, East field, but this was later fully enclosed by hedges, and it now consists of a number of small fields. The illustration above is only of one ninth of the total area covered by the map, but a representation of the whole map can be seen at the Visitors Centre in the grounds of the Dovecote Inn in the village. The very small strips are clearly evident.

An accompanying book, the *Terrier*, is an important historical document, because it provides details of the individuals owning each strip and the purposes for which they were being used. The map also indicates activities pursued, such as ploughing, harvesting and cattle grazing - not at one particular season but when they were being practised - an attractive form of artistic licence.

Over the centuries, the strips in the open fields have undergone changes as a result of the introduction of agricultural technologies. In medieval times a single strip of land was equivalent to one day's ploughing using horses, but the introduction of tractor-drawn ploughing enabled much more land to be ploughed, so that several strips were progressively merged, making use of the greater efficiency of modern methods. Even so, the principles of open field farming remain essentially the same as they were 500 years ago.

Despite the recent changes, the village is an important heritage site, with the land still worked by local farmers, who depend on the income derived from this uniquely cooperative tradition. This is not just a curious showcase, but an effective element of the agricultural landscape, although farmers also use more conventional methods in raising crops outside the open fields. Control and ownership of the land and system has, in the past, been complex, but today it is protected by a Parliamentary undertaking and by a Stewardship agreement.

Another unique feature of the system is that it continues to operate a type of manorial government, dating back to medieval times, that has legal control over farmers' activities. This is called the Court Leet, which meets in December and has the power to impose fines on those not observing the time-honoured manorial laws. A function of the Court is to appoint a jury (of ten men, and occasionaly one woman!) to inspect the fallow field, which in the rotational cyle has been put to grass for a year, but then drilled for wheat for the next year (see table below). On their tour the jury also check that each farmer has only ploughed his alloted share of the land and not encroached on neighboring strips. Following the tour, members of the jury have lunch at the Dovecote Inn and agree on which, if any, offences have been committed and the penalty to be exacted.

CYCLE YEAR	WINTER SOWN WHEAT	SPRING SOWN CROPS	FALLOW (GRASS)
FIRST	*SOUTH*	*MILL*	*WEST*
SECOND	WEST	*SOUTH*	*MILL*
THIRD	MILL	*WEST*	*SOUTH*

Annual Rotation of the crops

Unlike most farming villages, all the farms are situated either side of the main road to form a linear village as illustrated by the photograph below (courtesy by Andrew Hill). This is because the cooperative approach doesn't entail spreading out the separate farms as independent entities, concentrating on their own interests: a touch of medieval socialism?

For me, and I suspect others who experience contemplative pleasure in visiting places that convey a real sense of history, Laxton is still, reassuringly, alive: and in a modest, unpretentious way. No one sports a T shirt bearing the message *I Luv Laxton* or boasts of the fact that it is unique in Europe, although it is. Its workaday pratices continue, not exactly as they did 500 years ago, but with a quiet sense of the duty to respect the reality of our dependence on the environment we inhabit, but also that we create. As everything gets more urbanised, centralised and mechanised (and in many ways, worse, siliconised) we need places like Laxton to remind us that we can learn much from country traditions within which *Homo Sapiens* has spent over 99% of our existence.

Informations sources: Laxton: England's last open field village (2023) and website www.laxtonvisitorcentre.org.uk

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6. CUSTOMERS' COMMENTS

I'm not one for boasting, but the strategy which most companies, politicians, celebrities etc - and even the BBC third programme - find it necesary to adopt-is *self-promotion* - as the only means to avoid sinking into oblivion. The adverts of commercial TV are generally irritating, but now all BBC programmes seem intent on brainwashing their viewers and listeners with the oft- repeated message that their programmes are the *greatest* (shades of Cassius Clay and D Trump).

But I can see the point, because relying on personal recommendations by customers of Gladstone Books hasn't been a very effective strategy. But a welcome bunch of comments on the Book Guide website (https:/the bookguide.info/bookshops/central/nottinghamshire.html) in the last three months has been gratifying- and the more so for being written by people previously unknown to me, and as it happens none live locally. I hope their comments might persuade others, including those living nearby. to follow suit. All the comments below have been anonymised .

- A fantastic collection, clearly carefully curated - a definite example of quality being more important than quantity. It was lovely to be able to meet Ben and to be able to look around the books in our own time. The prices are extremely reasonable and we easily found fantastic books on a number of different topics. The most interesting and thoughtfully stocked book shop we visited this week. The turnover seems regular enough that a repeat visit in the future would be worthwhile. (10.05.24)

- A great find - so many beautifully collected works which reflect Ben's love of them. We spent a good two hours browsing the collection and returned home with some great works, beautifully kept and bound. Chatting to Ben was an added bonus in sharing stories. (15.05.4)

- A modest, but by no short measure, rich book shop. Low prices, helpful keeper, a wide and unique range leaving plenty of reason to return to the book room; a real gem for both enthusiast and laymen alike. (09.06.24)

- I went treasure hunting one day this week in an old-fashioned book-room in Southwell, the new site of Gladstone Books (www.gladstonebooks.co.uk) which you can visit by appointment. Shelves crammed full of a miscellany of book on a variety of subjects, too many to mention but including my favourites of history, classics, art, philosophy, poetry and fairy tales. For over an hour I enjoyed one of the joys of life called browsing books, including those which are out of print but not out of date, new, second hand like new, antiquarian and folio. I only managed to peruse less than half of the books displayed, which is the perfect excuse for returning to search the rest.

  As it was, I had already used up the budget I had allowed myself (the prices are really good) on an eclectic mix of Boz's essays, the poetry of Ogden Nash, an academic study on Medieval Households, Henry IV and a book on Miniatures. It was a delight to delve but another joy was conversing with the very knowledgeable and interesting proprietor, Ben Mepham, over a cup of coffee. It will not be long before I visit again to find new treasures, taking a bibliophile friend along with me. She will love it too.(02.07.24**)**

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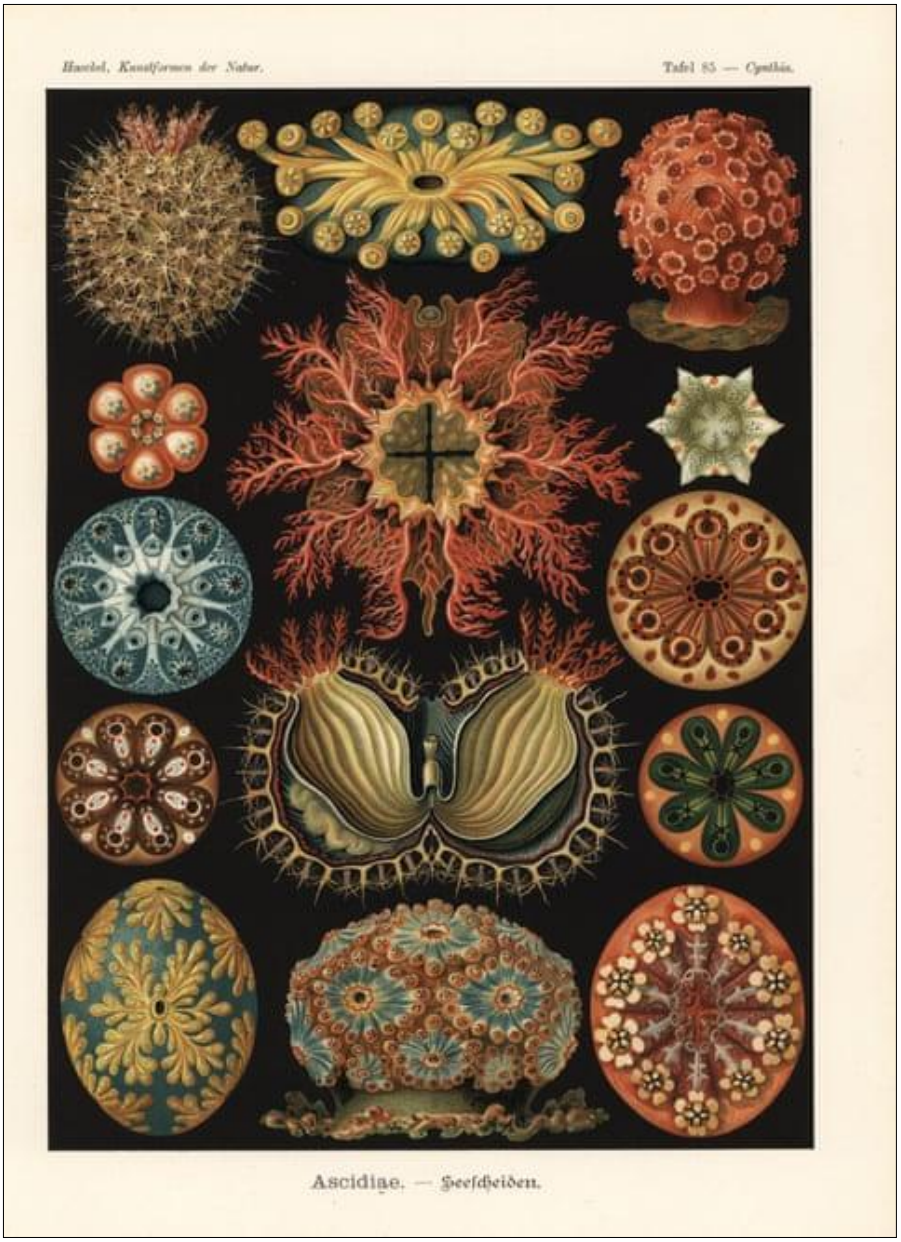
7. ADDENDUM

STRANGE AND WONDROUS CREATURES: PLANKTON AND THE ORIGINS OF LIFE ON EARTH

Ferris Jabr



Art forms in Nature (1904)

If plankton had not infused the sea and air with oxygen, modulated ocean chemistry and become key regulators of global climate, there would never have been forests, grasslands or wildflowers, nor dinosaurs, mammoths and whales, let alone bipedal apes gawking at moving sidewalks and incandescent lightbulbs in the early 20th century. ***If plankton did not exist, Earth would have no complex life of any kind.*** From the Guardian 20.08.24