

GREAT STAUGHTON AND ITS PEOPLE

**HOW A HUNTINGDONSHIRE VILLAGE MADE ITS MARK ON ENGLAND'S
HISTORY**

by

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Unravelled: a 200-year-old village mystery

In 1971, Rev. David Fleming, vicar of St Andrew's Church, Great Staughton, deposited with the Huntingdon Records Office an impressive volume, measuring 13 inches by 8 inches and containing 566 pages of elegantly written script. It is bound in handsome cardboard covers and has a lightly decorated spine on which is inscribed, 'MISCELLANIES'. When the volume is opened, a loose slip of paper (undated) falls out, bearing the words: 'This book I found in the Sunday school cupboard much exposed to damp. I could ascertain nothing as to its history.' It is signed C. McN. (Collingwood McNeil) Rushforth, vicar of St Andrew's 1909–1917 and successor to Rev. Henry George Watson.

What is the book? When was it written? Who was the author? The first two questions can be speedily answered. On the final page of the 566-page volume stand the words: 'Finished 20th December 1800'. The first page is equally revealing; it bears the title, *An Elegant Selection*. For the eighteenth-century reader, the title alone would almost certainly suggest that it was a commonplace book, a kind of home-made private encyclopaedia that could be a road map of an educational or intellectual journey, a source of religious or spiritual comfort, or simply an illustrated journey of a life. Mostly written by men, commonplace books combined the functions of an intellectual scrapbook, aide-memoir and diary. Not all commonplace books were compiled by private individuals. In 1803 for example, Oliver D. Cooke published *The Hive and Commonplace Book*, a volume of 216 pages whose subtitle explains the book's purpose: *A Collection of Thoughts on Civil, Moral, Sentimental and Religious Subjects: Selected from the Writings of Near One Hundred of the Best Authors ... Intended as a Repository of Sententious, Ingenious, and Pertinent Sayings, in Verse and Prose*.

To 'ascertain something of its history' and rescue the book from two centuries of damp obscurity, some detective work will be required but fortunately there are enough clues contained in the text to make the task less daunting than might first appear.

An initial examination of the ten-page index of the Great Staughton Commonplace Book reveals a total of 436 separate items of which by far the largest category, with eighty-four items, is poetry. Of the selections, twenty-nine take Nature and Natural History as their theme. Other categories are difficult to classify but often take the form of homilies or meditations. Most of the selections carry a moral, religious or a more general spiritual message. To leaven the otherwise serious purpose of the book, the Compiler of the volume has interspersed the pages with thirty-nine anecdotes, some humorous, some with a more serious moral purpose.

To begin at the beginning: the first article in the book is entitled, *The Wisdom and Goodness of God Display'd in several curious Observations on Fishes and Birds*, which combines two themes: Nature and Providence. 'What abundance of Fish do the waters produce of every size?' it asks. The answer is immediately given: 'God has provided for it, by multiplying them in a prodigious manner, and making the weak race swifter in their course than the others.' The author of the piece aligns the behaviour of the fish with God's commanding purpose. Thus, shoals of fish that are enjoyed by humans congregate near the shore so that they may be easily netted by fishermen. On the other hand, other fish, which are useless for human nutrition, live in remote seas. 'And what hand conducts them with so much care and goodness towards man?' It is the same for birds: 'What architect has taught them to build their elaborate nests?' The extract concludes: 'O Lord, how manifold are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all.'

This first extract was taken from a popular book published in 1797 and entitled, *Interesting Anecdotes, Memoirs, Allegories, Essays, and Poetical Fragments: Tending to Amuse the Fancy, and Inculcate Morality, Volume 2*, by Mr. Addison, author, a book that would almost certainly have been known to whoever compiled the commonplace book. Revealingly, the stated aims of Addison's collection were to *Amuse the Fancy, and Inculcate Morality*: education, edification and morality in a single volume. The Mr Addison referred to was the essayist, poet, playwright and politician Joseph Addison (1672–1719) co-founder with Richard Steele of the *Spectator* magazine in 1711.

A rapid review of the index reveals three further items referring directly or indirectly to Addison. The first Addison reference is a quotation by him, the second is entitled, *Tatlers and Spectators*, the celebrated political journal he and Steele founded, but it is the final reference that is much the most interesting: *Mr. Addison's calm and tranquil Death*. The article purports to describe the essayist's final moments when he summons the wayward Lord Warwick, 'a young man of very irregular life and loose opinions', to his death bed. Lord Warwick asks Addison to 'signify your commands, and be assured I will execute them with religious fidelity'. Addison responds by saying 'observe with what tranquillity a Christian can die'. Once again, a religious theme emerges.

The source of this article is surprising, a book that exerted a powerful influence on European thought in the latter half of the eighteenth century. It was entitled, *Über die Einsamkeit* (On solitude) and it was written between 1784 and 1786 by the German philosopher, physician and naturalist Johann Georg Zimmermann (1728–1795). An English edition of the book, published by Vernor and Hood, appeared in 1797, a useful pointer to the dating of the Commonplace Book. Forty-four items in the Great Staughton Commonplace Book are taken from Zimmermann's *On Solitude*, the most numerous by a considerable margin from a single author. The book clearly had a profound influence on the Compiler. *On Solitude* bears the subtitle *Or the influence of occasional retirement upon the mind and heart*. The retirement the author speaks of is not the ascetic solitude of the hermit's cell or the seclusion of a monk's retreat. For Zimmermann and presumably the Compiler, the keys to happiness and contentment (a word that recurs constantly in *Solitude*) are good health, friendship, the rejection of 'pomp, splendour and the trifles [*sic*] of life' and the cultivation of the pleasures of the mind. It is in solitude and especially the peace and tranquillity of rural life that 'the mind regenerates and acquires fresh force ... it is there that creative genius frees itself from the thralldom of society ... surrenders itself to the impetuous rays of an ardent imagination ... and facilitates his search after true felicity'.

The themes of Religion, Nature and Natural History recur constantly in the Commonplace Book and are nearly always associated with inner peace and contentment and the overriding design of Providence.

The second extract in the Commonplace Book, *Reflections on the Death of an Amiable Young Lady*, is a spiritual meditation on the precariousness of life, inspired by the death of Miss B-----, a young woman. The conclusion of the piece includes a place and date: 'Whitchurch in Shropshire, S.S., dated 5th April 1798.'

The analysis of the first two extracts and a cursory examination of the index discloses the foundation stones on which the Commonplace Book is built.. Thus, for example, religion features directly in fourteen extracts including *The Wisdom and Goodness of God*, *The blessings of divine revelation*, *A prayer*, and *A German Pulpit*. There are direct references to scripture, notably *Paraphrase on the 148th Psalm by Dr. Ogilvie, at Sixteen Years of Age*; or *'Paraphrase on the 122nd Psalm by Theodor Zwinger* (Swiss physician and Renaissance humanist scholar 1533–1588).

After several dozen pages, the Compiler introduces a group of four anecdotes on successive pages. The Compiler could have culled them from one of two sources. The first was a widely read

humorous volume entitled, *Hutchin's improved: being an almanack and ephemeris ... for the year of our Lord 1776*. Another possible source was the popular *London Magazine, Or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, 1774. Three of the anecdotes are mere harmless diversions but the fourth is more interesting. Entitled, *The Shy Quaker*, the anecdote comes from Addison's volume and relates the story of a bailiff seeking to deliver a writ on a Quaker. Presenting himself at the Quaker's house he is duly ushered in by the servant and told that 'Abimeleck shall see thee'. After an hour kicking his heels, the bailiff rings the bell and angrily demands to know why Abimeleck has not shown his face. The servant responds: 'Abimeleck has seen thee but he doth not like thee.' Quakers and other Nonconformists did not have an easy time of it in the eighteenth century. Denied entry to universities and forbidden by law from holding public office, could the Compiler of the Commonplace Book be expressing sympathy for the Quaker?

Closer analysis of the index brings an entirely unexpected discovery: no fewer than forty-seven items (ten per cent of the entire Commonplace Book) are concerned with the role and condition of women across time, continents and cultures. Thus we find, *Ceremony of the Jewish women*, *Hindustan women*, *Methods of Courtship at Constantinople*, *State of widows in primitive ages*, *Conjugal affection (Queen Eleanor sucking the poison from the wound of her husband Edward I, at mortal risk to herself)*, *A singular anecdote of Queen Elizabeth*, *Character of the Princess of Brunswick*, *Anecdote of an old woman and their present majesties*, *Prerogatives and duties of a maid of honour* to name but a few. A pointless sacrifice is described in *The custom of burning in India*, in which, on the death of her husband, his young widow is forced to sacrifice herself on the pyre in the ceremony of suttee. In a piece entitled, *Egyptian Women their Amusements*, the Compiler seems to nod approvingly at a scene depicting sportive diversions which 'tend to invigorate the lady by unbending her mind', a sentiment that the Compiler may well have taken to heart. Many of these extracts are taken from *The History of Women from the earliest antiquity to the present time*, by William Alexander the Younger, MD, of Edinburgh and published in 1782.

Most commonplace books were compiled by men and it is difficult to explain why, in the Great Staughton Commonplace Book, there are so many references to women. Unless, of course, the Compiler was a woman. The choice of five short poems must surely provide conclusive evidence of a women's hand behind the creation of the book: *A thought at waking*; *An exhortation: watch*; *The sceptic*; *A blush* and *The last day* were all taken from two sources: *The New Lady's Magazine, Or, Polite and Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, Volume 2, for the year 1787*, published by Rev. Mr Charles Stanhope and *The Lady's Magazine; Or, Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex, Appropriated Solely to Their Use and Amusement ...*, Volume 29, G. Robinson, London 1798. Are these magazines likely to have been amongst the reading matter of an eighteenth-century gentleman?

Having established that the Compiler of the Commonplace Book was a woman, is there any evidence in the book which might reveal something of her character and personality? The largest category by far in the book is poetry, with eighty-four items, drawn either from the collected works of the poets involved or from contemporary anthologies such as John Hinton's, *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, or J. Murray's *The English Review, Or, An Abstract of English and Foreign Literature*, Volume 15, both published in 1790. A year later came the publication of another collection of poetry: *ELEGANT EXTRACTS: Or Useful and Entertaining PIECES of POETRY, Selected for the IMPROVEMENT of YOUTH ... Being Similar in Design to ELEGANT EXTRACTS IN PROSE*.

No fewer than twenty-nine of the poems are drawn from the works of just two poets, James Thomson (1700–1748), whose *The Seasons* was one of the most popular and influential poetry collections of the eighteenth century. The poem, in blank verse, is a lengthy meditation on nature over the course of the four seasons and combines vivid depictions of natural phenomena with

religious feelings of awe and wonder at the works of the Almighty. *The Seasons* was the inspiration for Joseph Haydn's secular oratorio of 1801.

The second poet was James Hurdis (1763–1801) whose *The Village Curate*, published in 1788, when he was twenty-five, brought him immense fame and popularity. Robert Burns, no less, requested a copy. *The Village Curate* is a pastoral idyll, an autobiographical meditation on rural life across the seasons, with its simple joys and pleasures as seen through the eyes and imagination of a rural pastor. The 'Autumn' section of Hurdis' poem conveys the mood of nature and the divine:

*In such a silent, cool, and wholesome hour,
The Author of the world came down from Heav'n
To walk in Paradise, well pleas'd to mark
The harmless deeds of new-created man.
And sure the silent, cool, and wholesome hour
May still delight him, our atonement made.
Who knows but as we walk he walks unseen.*

The other extracts from Hurdis in the Book include: *A motive to contentment and thankfulness*, *Parnel*, *Lily of the vale*, and *The matchless maid*. All the poems are a natural complement to Zimmermann's, *On Solitude*: 'There is scarcely any writer who has not celebrated the happiness of rural privacy', and who 'delights himself ... with the melody of birds, the whisper of groves, and the murmurs of rivulets'.

Two writers bring a more overtly religious expression to the tone of the Commonplace Book. James Hervey (1714–1758), a Northamptonshire-born writer and poet, published in 1775 an influential three-volume work entitled, *Theron and Aspasio, or a series of Letters upon the most important and interesting Subjects*. Hervey supplies four extracts, including the longest in the Commonplace Book, entitled, *A walk through a picture gallery*, which runs to fifteen pages. It consists of a dialogue between Theron and Aspasio touching on art, nature and religion. The first painting they discuss depicts Hannibal's perilous crossing of the Alps and the shattered bodies of the soldiers who have fallen down the steep cliff face. Eventually, under 'the favour of Heaven', Hannibal's army successfully crosses the Alps and confronts the forces of Rome. In his text, Hervey marked the phrase 'the favour of Heaven' and appended a note in which he refers to the publication in 1748 of Richard Walter's account of Captain Anson's voyage around the world. Hervey notes regretfully that in his account, Richard Walter, himself a man of the cloth, had failed to acknowledge an 'interposing Providence in that masculine, nervous, noble narrative'. Hervey goes on to reveal his disappointment that the 'great commander (Anson) and his gallant officers did not express their gratitude for the power of Providence and Divine Goodness which 'passed unnoticed, unacknowledged and without any share of the Praise'.

Another of Hervey's contributions, *Chastity in Statuary and Painting, Taken from Mr. Hervey's Theron and Aspasio*, inveighs against the statuary of the ancient gods which are little more than 'an Assemblage of elaborate Trifles ... which, instead of improving our Morals, are calculated to be the very bane of both'. In *A conversation between Theron and Aspasio on their Return from Town into the Country*, Hervey uses his characters to contrast the simple joy and contentment of rural life with 'the splendid brocades ... which distinguish the Park and the Mall ... and the wanton and corrupting Airs of the Opera'. Once again, Nature, God and rural contentment are woven into a single theme.

Isaac Watts (1674–1748) is best known for his hymns, *Our God, Our Help in Ages Past*, and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, both still sung today. It was in 1741, towards the end of his life, that Watts published, *The Improvement of the Mind: Or, A Supplement to the Art of Logic* and an addendum *To which is Added, Discourse on the Education of Children and Youth*. Watts stressed the importance of education and learning especially for the young: 'The children of the present age are the hope of the age to come', is the motif of the work. The theme of education recurs several times in the Commonplace Book.

There is another poet who features only briefly in the book but whose ghostly presence seems to permeate the whole work. Her name was Anna Letitia Barbauld, née Aikin, one of the most remarkable women of the age, now all but forgotten: charismatic teacher, founder of schools, poet, essayist, polemicist and author of ground-breaking children's literature. Barbauld, born into a Nonconformist background, baptised at the Presbyterian Church in St Ives, Huntingdonshire, a mere twenty miles from Great Staughton, was one of the very few women to break through the male-dominated ranks of eighteenth-century intellectual society. It is tempting to speculate that the Compiler of the Great Staughton Commonplace book may have met this pioneering female intellectual. Barbauld's poetry was an influential precursor of English Romanticism although her reputation was subsequently eclipsed by the publication of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. Towards the end of the Commonplace Book, a piece entitled, *Immortality* depicts a philosopher, the pious and benevolent Hiero. Confronted with the prospect of the 'gloom of terrors of annihilation', in the darkness of his garden, he derives comfort from 'aspiring hope may direct his views to immortality'. As sunrise vanquishes the enveloping gloom, he finds consolation in the tranquillity of nature. His thoughts move him to recite to himself the opening words of a poem, *A summer evening's meditation*, by Anna Letitia Barbauld.

*At this still hour the self-collected Soul
Turns inwards, and beholds a stranger there
Of high descent, and more than mortal rank;
An embryo God, a spark of fire divine ...*

Barbauld contributes a second poem in the Commonplace Book, an extract from *An Address to the Deity*, taken from her 1773 first collection of poems in which she reflects on the hope of eternal life.

*Teach me to quit this transitory scene
With decent triumph and a look serene;
Teach me to fix my ardent hopes on high,
And having liv'd to thee, in thee to die.*

This extract is chosen by the Compiler as an introduction to a series of four powerful poems denouncing the evils of the slave trade. Many of the anti-slavery campaigners, such as John Wesley and Samuel Wilberforce, shared a common background in Nonconformism; nine of the original twelve members of the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade were Quakers. Could this explain the inclusion of *The Shy Quaker* anecdote in the Commonplace Book? In 1791, Anna Letitia Barbauld, herself of Nonconformist stock, had written a fierce polemic, *Epistle to William Wilberforce Esq. On the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade*, in support of the campaign in Parliament to abolish the trade.

The first poem in the anti-slavery sequence is entitled, *The negro's complaint*, by William Cowper and the Compiler may have come across it in the August 1793 edition of the *Gentleman's Magazine*, a publication that might well have been found in the Compiler's drawing room. The subject of the title laments his status as a slave 'men from England bought and sold me / Paid my price in paltry gold.'

*Forc'd from home and all its pleasures,
Africa's waste I left forlorn
To increase a stranger's treasure
O'er the raging billows borne.*

The poem ends with an impassioned plea for understanding:

*Slaves of gold, whose sordid dealings
Tarnish all your boasted powers
Prove that you have human feelings
Ere you proudly question ours.*

The Compiler could also have read these poems in a widely circulated book criticising the slave trade entitled, *The Blind African Slave, or memoirs of Boyrereau Brinch, nick-named Jeffrey Brace*. The preface to the book explains its missionary purpose: 'we must spurn with indignation any idea of the propriety of christian [*sic*] nations ... holding as slaves, the whole African people, because they are not civilized, or bear not the same complexion, having no other crime, save credulity or innocence'.

An even more savage indictment of the trade and a government that wilfully sanctioned it is *The Negro Boy and the Watch*. The poem originally appeared in *The Monthly Magazine: Or, British Register*, in the edition of 22 June 1796. It is signed 'Anti Doulos' (Against Slavery). The *Monthly Magazine* carried a helpful note explaining the background to the poem. The African Prince who had lately arrived in England, being asked what he had given for his watch, replied; 'What I'll never give again - I gave a fine boy for it.' A white slave trader expresses remorse for the savagery with which he destroyed the family: 'His father's hope, his mother's pride / Though black, yet comely, to their view / I tore him helpless from their side.' 'He who walks upon the wind' will bring salvation to these people and the miseries that have been inflicted on them and:

*In his own time will soon destroy
The oppressors of the Negro boy.*

The final poem of the anti-slavery quartet is by one Mr Riley: *On a friend refusing to sign the petition concerning the slave trade, because it was thought a party matter*, an overtly political tirade urging the prominent politicians of the day – Fox, Sheridan, Burke, Pitt – to rise up in opposition to the disgrace of the slave trade. The source of this poem was *The British Poetical Miscellany*, published in 1798, whose motto read: 'To please the fancy and Improve the mind'.

*Yet in this one great point we all agree
There's no excuse for wanton cruelty ...
Let's freely do the little that we can*

To stop a Traffic, the disgrace of man.

The social conscience of the Compiler also extended to a profound sympathy for the poor and dispossessed of her own country; a number of poems describe the misery and poverty suffered by the new industrial masses. A *Song sung at the blind asylum Liverpool* by John Smyth, is taken from *The Reports of the Society for Bettering the Condition and Increasing the Comforts of the Poor*, edited by Sir T. Bernard, and published in 1798. In *Lines sent with a shilling to a voluntary contribution in aid of govt at Welch Pool Montgomeryshire*, the author of the poem hopes that his modest donation will help preserve the country from its foes.

*Go forth my mite and join the heap
That loyalty bestows
Go guard our coasts, go rule the deep.*

The surprising source of the poem reveals who these foes might be: *The Antijacobin Review: And Protestant Advocate: Or, Monthly Political and Literary Censor*, London 1799.

The character and personality of the Compiler is now being revealed; a woman with a strong social conscience, possessing deep religious and moral convictions. There is also a prominent Nonconformist streak in her choice of contributors. James Hervey, greatly influenced by John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists; Isaac Watts, a pastor at a Congregational chapel in London. James Thomson's father was a pastor in the Church of Scotland. Anna Letitia Barbauld was brought up and baptised in a Nonconformist household. Two other contributors to the book, Theodor Zwinger and his fellow Swiss Johann Caspar Lavater (1741–1801), were both of a firmly Calvinist cast of mind.

The Great Staughton Commonplace Book ends, appropriately for a book so imbued with religion and Christian morality and teaching, with *A devotional reflection*, taken from *The Reader's Cabinet*, by John Kingston, published in London during the 1790s, and whose primary purpose was *to Instruct the Mind ... Reform the Morals ... and Amend the Heart*, an appropriate concluding sentiment for the sternly moral Commonplace Book.

*The follies of an early life I see
Nor aught so shocking now appears to me
Those actions never could from thought arise,
Whose only fruits are penitence and sighs;
O! may the Omniscient then, the whole impute,
Not to the man, but to the incautious brute
Sunk by corruption, and restor'd by grace
The Gospel terms I gratefully embrace
Since Reason and Religion both agree
Comfort blest Saviour! Only flows from thee.*

Under which appears, in large letters, written no doubt with a relieved flourish, the word 'Finis' and the date, 20 December 1800.

Very often, a commonplace book occupied a whole lifetime of reflection and experience. Is there any indication of the length of the creative process in the case of the Great Staughton Book? Most of the extracts come from books mainly written in the last quarter of the eighteenth century,

but there are a number of more ephemeral items, largely drawn from newspapers and journals of the day and dating from the two years between 1798 and 1799. Thus, *A Thunder Storm*, a vivid account of 'a very extraordinary and powerful Tornado', which struck Ramsgate on 13 and 14 August 1799, causing much damage. An *Extraordinary Story* recounts the mysterious disappearance of a young lady who 'absented herself from her friends' in April 1798. *Phenomenon* records a remarkably hot day in Bourdeaux [*sic*] at the beginning of August 1798 when a violent 'burning gale' caused women and children to faint in the heat. A curious item in the *London Chronicle* (price sixpence), dated 8–10 August 1799, was entitled, *Imperial Rescript by the Sublime Porte, to Mr. Spencer Smith, the English Minister in honor of Sir Sydney Smith* refers to a diamond aigrette (an elaborate honorific headdress often studded with gems) awarded to Commodore Smith in gratitude for his military support of the Ottoman government. The award was 'Given the 14th Muharem in the year of the Hejira, 1214', or according to the Gregorian calendar, 17 June 1799. Another newspaper report records that on 1 August 1799 the church of St Paul, Covent Garden, was consecrated by the Lord Bishop of London following decades of costly repairs and rebuilding. Three days later comes the report of the funeral of Lord Charlemont, a cultivated and generous art-lover. An anecdote about a faithful spaniel keeping vigil by the body of his master, a French soldier killed in battle, appeared in the newspapers on 2 October 1799. Finally, there are recommendations for two contemporary books: Mrs Dobson's 'elegant' translation of the *Life of Petrarch*, published in London by Vernor and Hood in 1797 and *The Tragical Tale of the Princess Tarrakanoff*, 'lately published in 1798 in 2 volumes with elegant portraits'.

The dates are compressed into a brief period mainly between 1798 and 1800. The elegant copperplate handwriting provides a further clue to the book, having been compiled in a relatively short space of time. Throughout its 566 pages, it betrays no trace of any deterioration that might have been caused by infirmity or old age. What can be stated with certainty is that the Commonplace Book was created in Great Staughton and subsequently deposited in St Andrew's Church, possibly after the death of its creator.

On 16 July 1796, Rev. James Pope was inducted into 'the real, actual and corporal possession of the vicarage of Stoughton Magna' in a ceremony performed by Rev. Edward Maltby, vicar of Buckden, Commissary, and Sir John Harding. James Pope, born in 1757, was the son of a prosperous landowner, William Pope, 'gent', of Hillingdon Middlesex. Like nearly all vicars of Great Staughton, he studied at St John's College Oxford, obtaining a BA degree in 1777; he became a Fellow of St John's College and was awarded an MA in 1781. He obtained his Bachelor of Divinity degree in 1786. James Pope occupied the living of St Andrew's Church, Great Staughton, from 1796 until his death in 1822 at the age of sixty-five. He was buried in the graveyard of St Andrew's on 16 January 1822. A plaque in the chancel and a stained-glass window on the wall of the south aisle commemorates his ministry.

In the same year that James Pope took up his ministry, an entry appeared in the Church of England registers, recording the marriage, on 24 November 1796, of Rev. James Pope to the 26-year-old Miss Ann Havens of Donyland Hall, East Donyland, St Lawrence, Essex. Ann Havens was born on 1 May 1770, the daughter of Philip and Lucy Havens, into a devout Quaker family who occupied the substantial seventeenth-century moated manor of East Donyland Hall, near Colchester, Essex. By law, Nonconformists, such as Quakers, were not permitted to study at university and were barred from holding public office or entering the civil service. It is true that Anna Letitia Barbauld and Mary Wollstonecraft managed to slip through the net and are an inspiration to women to this day, but they were the exceptions.

The adult Ann Havens would have been expected to conform to the norms of society as an obedient wife to her husband and an attentive mother to her children. The law was the law and many Nonconformists, Philip and Lucy Havens amongst them, took the reluctant view that it was in the best interest of their children for them to undergo baptism in the Church of England. So it was that on 3 September 1775, Ann Havens was baptised at the church of St Giles-in-the-Fields in Holborn, London.

The newly-married Popes settled in Great Staughton and Ann Havens took on the role of wife to the vicar of the parish. The union of James Pope and Ann Havens was fruitful. Between 1798 and 1813, James and Ann Pope had nine children: seven sons and two daughters, all baptised at the church of St Andrew, Great Staughton. Settled in the rectory in the rural seclusion of Huntingdonshire, perhaps Ann Havens thought of setting herself a challenge to assert her fervent Christian beliefs whilst also celebrating the virtues of her Nonconformist Quaker upbringing, expressing her sympathy for the poor and oppressed and acknowledging her admiration for women like Anna Letitia Barbauld who had succeeded in contemporary male-dominated intellectual society. So, in 1796, the year in which she and her new husband began their new lives at the vicarage in Great Staughton, Ann Havens embarked on her great project, compiling *An Elegant Selection*, her personal Commonplace Book. She may have set herself a target of completing the work in time to mark the dawn of a new century. In that, she succeeded, adding *Finis*, the final flourish to the Commonplace Book, on 20 December 1800.

After 200 years of damp obscurity, it is fitting that the Compiler of the book should now emerge into the daylight and receive this deserved and long overdue recognition. The Commonplace Book was conceived, created and compiled between 1796 and 1800 by Ann Havens, wife of Rev. James Pope, vicar of St Andrew's Church, Great Staughton.

There is one final item to be recorded. It appeared in volumes 182–183 of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, edited by F. Jefferies and dated 1847. It contains the following short obituary notice: *Worcester 1 July 1847 at Mitton Parsonage Mrs. [Ann] Pope, [née Havens], aged 77, relict of the late James Pope, Vicar of Great Staughton, Huntingdonshire.* Ann Pope spent her final years with Rev. Charles Wharton, his wife Anne and three servants at Lower Mitton parsonage in Worcestershire.

There is a modern postscript to this story. Sophia Ann Pope (1848–1920), granddaughter of James Pope, commissioned an impressive 20-foot-high cross, designed by the noted Scottish architect Sir John Ninian Comper FSA (1864–1960) to be erected in Great Staughton burial ground in memory of her husband William Havens Pope (1840–1915). Of Rev. Pope's seven sons, James, born in 1801, went on to marry Anna Sophia Mills in London in 1843 and their daughter Sophia Ann Pope was born five years later, in 1848. Another of Rev. Pope's sons was William Havens Pope, born in 1808. He married Louisa Hogg in 1835 and five years later their son, also called William Havens Pope was born. In 1873, William Havens Pope married his first cousin Sophia Ann Pope in London.