

Family Tree Magazine Sep. 1988

Some Thoughts on Anniversaries and Centenaries

□ By RAYMOND J. SKINNER

THIS year, 1988, marks among its prospective ceremonies the commemoration of two historically important landfalls on alien soil: firstly, the year will see the tercentenary of a taciturn Dutchman's arrival in Devon on the 5 November, 1688 at Torbay, thence to the Throne of England as William III; secondly, 1988 is the bicentenary, even now being celebrated, of the first settlers from England to arrive in Australia in 1788 - one might say the progenitors of today's "amber-liquid" drinkers. Both these events have in common an invasion, more or less welcome or successful, depending on one's political views or feelings about colonialism.

However, 1988 also has two further pending commemorations: there is a quarter century marking the abortive attempt at an invasion of these shores by Philip of Spain's wooden-walled galleons on the 29 July, 1588, and, on a completely different plane, a centenary worthy of mention, if perhaps less of actual celebration - the bloody murders of five poor prostitutes in London's East End in 1888, the reign of terror forever associated with Jack the Ripper.

It is perhaps an ironic commentary on today's sense of fitness that there are recently published no less than half-a-dozen new books dealing with this seemingly perennially-fascinating episode, which is made the more absorbing by the absence of a proved culprit for these horrific slayings.

The feeling for history which is desirable for a true appreciation of such events, within their contexts, can be positively enhanced by a genealogical awareness of one's own ancestors for, when it is possible to identify forebears who may themselves have lived through these events - perhaps even been materially affected by them - then such anniversaries become not merely dates on an arbitrary calendar, but assume a reality which gives new life to the

printed word or faded photograph. My father's parents lived in the East End, a mere few streets away, at the time when the Ripper commenced his terrible orgy of killing. They, like most of their neighbours, would have been afraid to venture out into the maze of mean streets and ill-lit alleyways which formed the haunt of the killer. Although not of the particular profession practised by these poor drabs, there must have been many women who feared to offer temptation to his random vengeance by walking in the streets after nightfall.

Like London, most-ports at this period were "melting-pots" of the world's adventurers: Liverpool, Hull, Glasgow, Plymouth or Portsmouth - in each could be found dubious characters who rubbed shoulders with the native population dependent upon their trade for a livelihood. They would have been little altered a hundred years earlier, when Governor Phillip sailed from Portsmouth with the first free settlers for Australia, bound, in Captain Cook's wake, for Botany Bay, the convict settlement. Phillip rejected the idea of a settlement there, however, as he realised that the new colony would soon become the home of free people, and that it was better to settle his human cargo further north at Port Jackson. As he himself said, "I would not wish convicts to lay the foundations of an Empire. I think that they should ever remain separated from the garrison and other settlers that may come from Europe."

When Cook, on his first voyage of discovery in 1770, named Port Jackson, a few miles from Botany Bay, he was paying tribute to Sir George Jackson, the Judge-Advocate of the Fleet, who had influenced the Admiralty on the explorer's behalf. Jackson was the eldest surviving son of George Jackson of Richmond, Yorkshire, who married Hannah, daughter of William Ward of Guisborough. The descendants of this marriage were hence-

forth known as Ward-Jackson - a grandson was also a founding father, but this time of the town and port of West Hartlepool on the North-East coast.

Ralph Ward Jackson, this grandson, was at first a solicitor in Stockton-on-Tees, but he was to found a town and docks on the barren sand-dunes of Hartlepool Bay, in his later guise as Chairman of the Stockton & Hartlepool Railway Company. West Hartlepool, a Victorian "new-town", was to owe its birth solely to Ward Jackson's vision, energy, and determination, for he was a characteristic Victorian entrepreneur who inherited the sense of adventure that had fired his predecessors such as Cook and George Jackson. In a mere twenty years, Jackson's creation became the fourth-largest port in England with a population of some thirteen thousand, which itself would double by the end of the century - this from a village of some three hundred inhabitants!

This influx of population inevitably included descendants of the Whitlock families mentioned in the following paragraphs; like many other rural agriculturalists, they succumbed to the lure of money and regular jobs in the cities and larger towns.

A century before Australia was settled, William of Orange was invited to England after the Interregnum; at this time my maternal Yorkshire ancestors were yeoman farmers in the Vale of York, far removed from the centres of population and political intrigue. They would have taken less than a passing interest in a mere change of monarch, which anyway would probably only have affected them marginally. Taxes would still have to be paid - perhaps at an even higher rate! Sheep and cattle would still have to be vivalled; one's marriageable daughters provided with a suitable dowry; the barns and larders kept stocked against the North's hard winters, and when a neighbour died, inventories of his possessions would have to be taken by four honest men.

The glorious Elizabethan year of the Armada was also around the time when many parish registers first began to be systematically kept in books for that purpose, with a view to their survival for posterity. Thomas Cromwell's edict instituting parish registration had dated back some fifty years before the Armada, but this first period of existence had been a haphazard affair of loose sheets of paper and forgetful parish priests; not until the end of the 16th century, at Queen Elizabeth's insistence, did the use of books with parchment pages become usual.

Some of my earliest ancestors recorded in such registers date back to the 1580s: in the villages close to the River Swale near Topcliffe in Yorkshire there were many such. In the year 1588 the parish register of Topcliffe has the following poignant entry: "Sibble, (sic), daughter of Richard Whitlock, of Rainton, blacksmith, drowned in the River Swale, buried 28th June."

She was just short of her tenth birthday. In past days, perhaps, the high rate of infant mortality made the jubilation consequent upon the achievement of an offspring's first birthday an event which called forth the type of thanksgiving which we have gladly foregone. From these "early" birthdays it was but a short step to the regular celebration of yearly milestones. Each of our many days is too often much like another - a daunting prospect - which can be somewhat alleviated by the celebration of anniversaries in order to prevent the atrophy of memory, and to ease the numbing repetition of the treadmill.

1988 provides an unusual number of opportunities to indulge ourselves in the pleasures of commemorative nostalgia - and we still have our birthdays!

WLAN 7 NG 20

May the 20th 1687					
A true and perfect Inventory of the goods and Chattells of Lancelott Whitlocke of Baldersby late disseased.	£	s	d	Item ffor wooden vessel	1 0 0
Firstly his purse and his apparrell	3	0	0	Item ffor brasse and pewter (vessels)	2 13 4
Item in the foore house two tables two firms two chairs with other implements	2	0	0	Item ffor ???	3 0 10
Item in the low parlour one cubbert one bedstead one pannell chest two or three little chests with other implements	2	10	0	Item one carriage one plough with other nessesaries there unto belonging	7 0 0
Item in the new parlour one table two bedsteads with bedding belonging them and other implements	2	10	0	Item foure cows foure calves one bull	12 0 0
Item in the new chamber one spinning wheele with other implements		6	8	Item eight oxen	30 0 0
Item in another chamber thre bedsteads	16	0		Item thre horses	8 0 0†
				Item foureteene sheepe	4 13 4
				Item two sows elleven pigs	2 13 4
				Item Corne growing uppon the ground	30 0 0
				Item for poultry	3 6*
				Lancelott Browne	Thomas Couper
				Richard ffarmery	John Whitlocke
				† ? eight	
				* ? six	

1588 NRS 510