

New and Enlarged Edition.

NYSCOUGHFEE

AND
ITS HISTORY.

The HALL and GARDENS
WITH
ILLUSTRATIONS.

ALSO A
Poem by Rd. Harris, Esq., K.C.,

ENTITLED,

"The Maid of Nyscoughfee."

PRICE, THREEPENCE.

SPALDING:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY THE "SPALDING FREE PRESS"
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1912



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NEW AND ENLARGED EDITION.

A YSCOUGH FEE

AND

ITS HISTORY.

The HALL and GARDENS,

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS

Of the HALL, GARDENS, LAKE, OWL TOWER,
And Other Objects of Interest.

ALSO A

Poem by Rd. Harris, Esq., K.C.

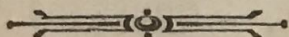
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AYSCOUGHFEE HALL AND ITS HISTORY.



THE ACQUISITION OF THE PROPERTY.

THE Ayscoughfee Hall and Gardens at Spalding were acquired by the Town as a permanent Memorial of the Diamond Jubilee of the late Queen Victoria. As a result of a public subscription, over £1,000 were raised at the onset, and the remainder of the purchase money, which, with legal costs, amounted to £1,100, was borrowed upon the personal security of a number of Gentlemen having the interest of the Town at heart.

Since then, some further liberal contributions have been given. At a social gathering in April of 1901, under the chairmanship of Mr. G. F. Birch, an additional £160 was subscribed. Whit-Monday Fete, the same year, realised £150; and this was followed by a two-days' Bazaar in Ayscoughfee Gardens in the summer, which yielded a surplus of something like £350. The debt on the property has by these efforts been reduced to about £450, at which figure it stood at the date of the publication of the second edition of this booklet, in January, 1902. The Committee contemplate further effort, with a view to extinguishing this liability, and of handing over the property to the town free of debt.

The initiative in the matter of the purchase of Ayscoughfee as a Jubilee Memorial was taken by Mr. Samuel Kingston, the first Chairman of the Spalding Urban District Council,

which body lent their cordial support to the enterprise, the Town being in much need of a place of public resort such as the Ayscoughfee Gardens furnish.

The property was acquired from Mrs. Johnson, of Blundeston, Suffolk, but the purchase money (£2,000) is by no means regarded as the present value of the estate.

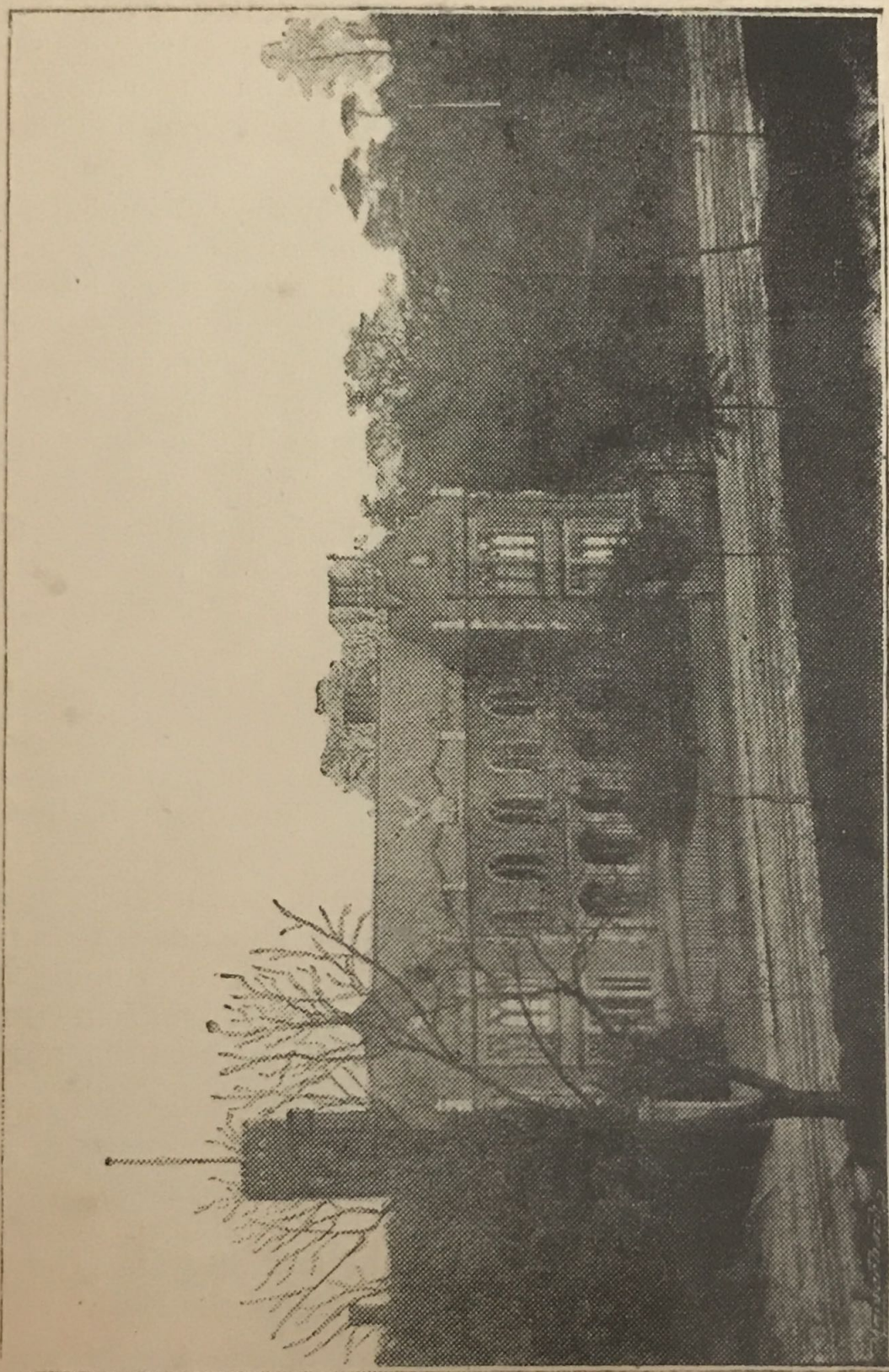
The Trustees of the property are Mr. S. Kingston, Mr. G. F. Birch, Mr. H. L. Enderby, Mr. E. W. Gooch, Mr. M. Taylor, and Mr. J. T. White, at that time all members of the Spalding Urban Council; whilst the Committee of Management consists of Mr. S. Kingston, chairman; Mr. W. A. Southwell, vice-chairman; Messrs. J. T. Atton, G. F. Birch, H. L. Enderby, W. Fletcher, G. W. Ham, G. Hopper, M. Taylor, J. T. White, J. Wilson, E. T. Waring, T. C. Stubbs, H. White, W. White, G. Birch, H. Birch, A. V. Seymour, and E. A. P. Seymour. The Hon. Secretary to the Committee is Mr. A. L. Seymour, of Sheep Market, Spalding.

A short descriptive history of the Hall and Gardens is appended:—

The Hall.

AYSCOUGHFEE Hall, which is a spacious brick Mansion in the Tudor style, was built in the year 1420, or thereabouts, by Sir Richard Aldwyn, a wool stapler, whose son (Sir Nicholas Aldwyn) was Lord Mayor of London in the year 1509; but an earlier reference to the estate is to be found as far back as the time of the Crowland Survey.

The property covers about $4\frac{1}{2}$ acres, including its fine Dutch gardens, and specially noticeable for their magnificent yew hedges, which are of great age and striking appearance. It has Newgate-lane (commonly known as Lovelane) as a boundary on the East; Holyrood House, the residence of Ald. Fitzalan Howard, J.P., in part on the North; and the River Welland on the West.



THE HALL.—Another View.

Sir Richard Aldwyn, it is recorded, ranked as one of the benefactors of Spalding. He was a considerable contributor to the funds of the church at Cowbit, and on the occasion of the death of his son gave "twelvepence each to three thousand poor persons in and about Spalding."

The estate was subsequently held by the Ayscoughs, a distinguished family in Lincolnshire, who settled in the north of the county, and it is from them that the place takes its name. The term "fee" signifies the knight's fee—a territorial grant made to the person knighted, as his estate, sufficient to maintain his dignity—thus Ayscough Fee Hall meant the Hall upon the estate, or manor, or fee of the Ayscoughs.

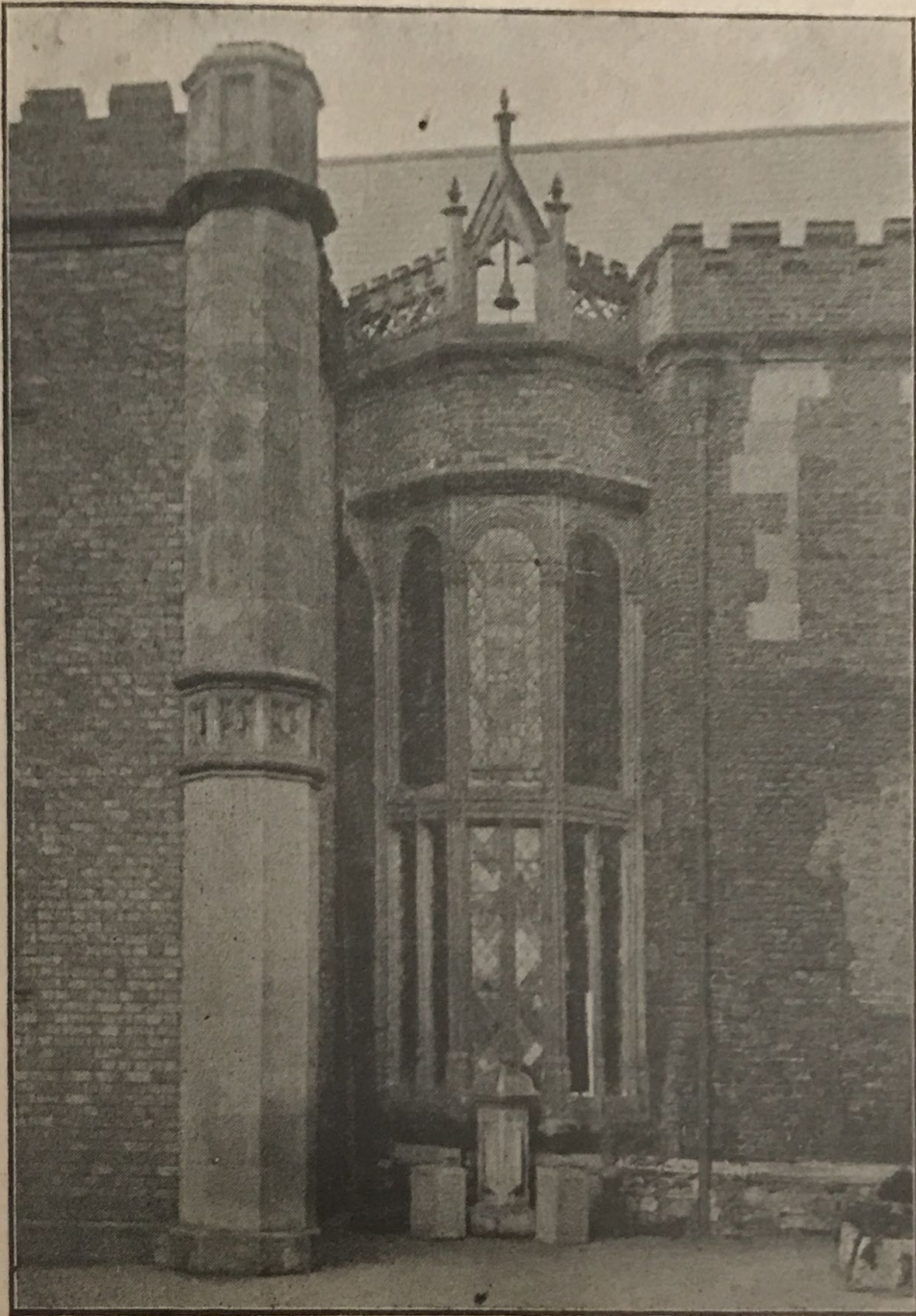
It is worthy of note that of this family (the name of which was sometimes pronounced and often spelt "Askew") was Anne Askew, the Martyr, who was first racked in the Tower of London, and was then burnt with four others at the stake, at Smithfield, on July 16th, 1546.

In the year 1619, the hall belonged to Bevil Wimberley, and a member of this family (by marriage), who also occupied the hall, was John Evington, who wrote a learned treatise on Crown Law, the MS. of which was for some time in the library of Ayscoughfee.

About the middle of the seventeenth century, the estate passed into the hands of the Johnsons, of Pinchbeck, a branch of the Johnsons, of Rutland, the founders of Uppingham School, and ever since then members of the Johnson family have, as owners or occupiers, been associated with the estate.

In 1683, the owner and occupier of the Hall was Francis Johnson, and the same year the marriage took place of his daughter, Jane Johnson, the sole heiress of Ayscoughfee, to Maurice Johnson, of Spalding, the father of Maurice Johnson, the famous antiquary, and founder of the Spalding Gentlemen's Society, who also owned and occupied the Hall.

The last mentioned representative of the family was a barrister-at-law, and practised in Spalding. He founded the Gentlemen's Society, the oldest institution of its kind in the



THE OLDEST PART OF AYSCOUGHFEE, with View
of Ancient Glass (*see page 8*).

kingdom, in the year 1710. His wife was the daughter of Joshua Ambler, of Spalding, and was the granddaughter of Sir Anthony Oldfield, and lineally descended from Sir Thomas Gresham, the founder of Gresham College, and of the Royal Exchange, London. By this lady, he had twenty-six children, of whom it is recorded sixteen sat down together at his table.

Later on, another occupant of the Hall was the Rev. Maurice Johnson, who in 1793 took out the old stone window frames and put wooden ones in, and also cut down the yew trees which had formerly grown in front of the Hall. Subsequently, when the Hall had passed to another representative of the family, new stone window frames were put in, and the turret was also raised and beautified, whilst in 1845, a splendid coat of arms carved in stone was put up.

A very interesting feature is the Medallion, built into the wall over one of the doorways at the back of the Hall. The sculpture is rude; and time has left its mark upon it. Some difference of opinion exists among archaeologists as to the significance of the scene depicted. It has been suggested by some that it represents an adult baptism; by others, that the kneeling figure is suing for pardon for some offence at the King's hands. A far more likely explanation, however, and one favoured by so competent an authority as Dr. Perry, is that it illustrates a gentleman being knighted by the King. What appears to be the royal figure is seated, and in his right hand he holds either the sceptre or a sword; if the latter, it would be used in the act of "dubbing the Knight." In the centre of the group is a gentleman with his left hand passed under the arm of a lady. To the extreme right is a personage, paying great attention to the same lady. His right hand appears at the back of her head, and their faces are in very close proximity! The figures are dressed in costumes of the early Tudor period; and it is by no means unlikely that the kneeling figure is none other than Sir Richard Aldwyn, Lord Mayor of London in 1509, son of the builder of the Hall.

In the year 1819, the two rows of fine chestnut trees



A BIT OF ANCIENT SCULPTURE.—*See Opposite Page.*

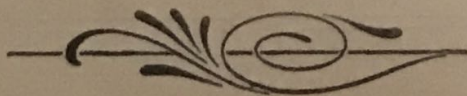
were planted on each side of the carriage road leading to the back entrance of the Hall, whilst it is worthy of note that the Hall was stripped of its thatch and slated in 1772.

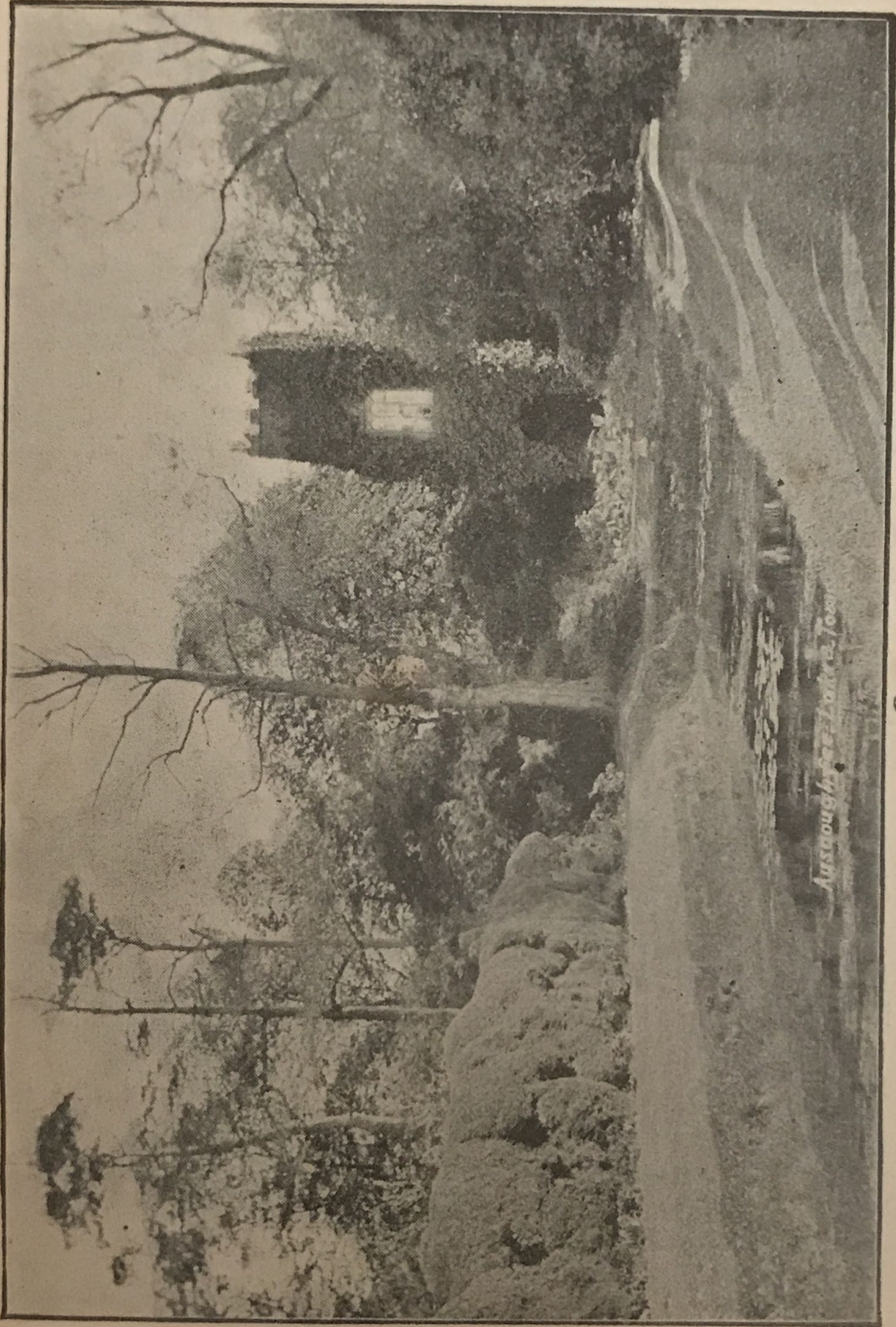
For twenty-two years, the property was in the occupation of the late Mr. C. F. Bonner and his representatives, the owner being Mrs. Johnson, late of Blundeston Lodge, near Lowestoft (and now residing at Felixstowe), widow of a former Maurice Johnson who lived at the Hall.

The mansion contains some interesting pictures, and some valuable old glass, as well as seventeenth century heraldic glass, but most of the family portraits are now in Mrs. Johnson's possession. An historical lock and key, of vast proportions, which belonged to the keep of Tailbois' Castle, and which formerly hung in Ayscoughfee Hall, was removed some years ago, and its whereabouts is not now known.

The Hall contains very fine drawing and dining rooms, each about thirty feet long, the former leading into the library by means of a pair of folding doors. The library walls and ceiling are handsomely panelled in mahogany. There are thirteen bedrooms and two dressing-rooms, whilst in the turret there is also a very large room. A spacious billiard room has been added to the Hall, which has undergone various alterations at different times.

It is worthy of note that Father Ignatius, the well-known Anglican Monk, was educated at Ayscoughfee, and from a letter received from him prior to the publication of the first edition of this history, it is evident that he still feels an interest in the home of his student days. In sending a donation to the Ayscoughfee fund, Father Ignatius says he keenly sympathises with the promoters in their endeavour to retain the Hall and Gardens for the benefit of the townsfolk of Spalding.





THE LAKE AND TOWER.

The Gardens.

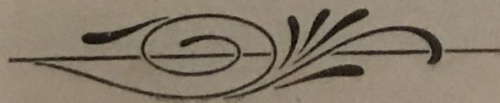
THE Gardens, which are the special attraction of the place, are set out in the old Dutch style, of which there are but few existing examples. The yew hedges before mentioned are amongst the finest in England, and are said to be nearly five hundred years old, dating back to the time of the erection of the Hall.

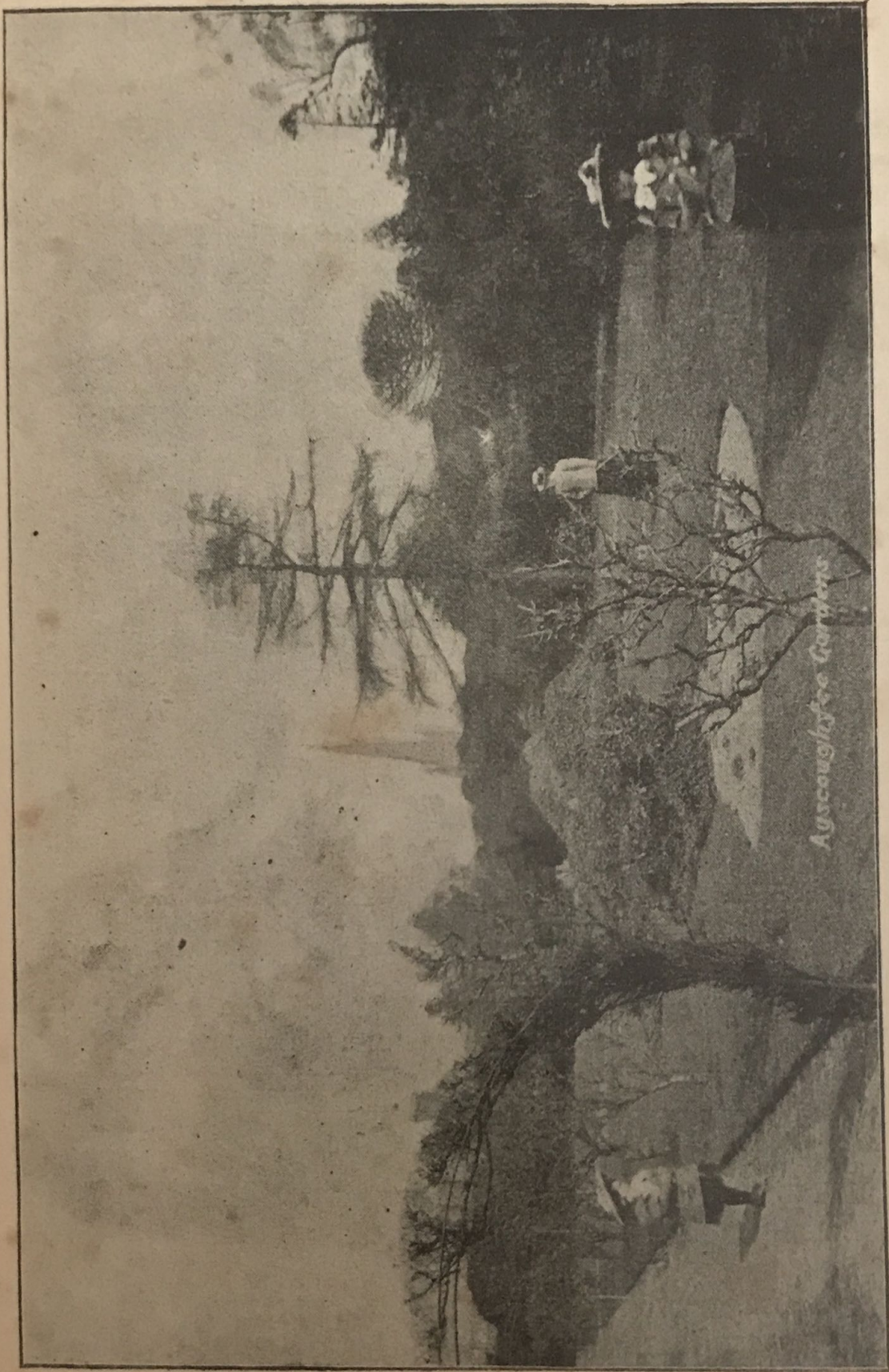
They are described by Mr. G. F. Barrell, J.P., F.R.H.S., who may be taken as an authority on the subject, as not to be matched in their own style of picturesque beauty, and as being greatly superior to those of the Duke of Cleveland, at Battle, one of the other best examples in the country.

In the grounds is an ornamental fishpond, for which fresh water is from time to time taken in from the River Welland by means of a tunnel. At the further end is situated the Tower and fernery. Here is an old-time smoke-room, and a staircase leads to the owl-chamber, the Tower being the resort of these birds at the present time.

Near to the Tower is a spacious Ice-house. On the lawn in front of the drawing-room are two lead figures, said to have been dug up from the bed of the River Thames. The beautiful Gardens are much frequented by Residents and Visitors, who are loud in their praise of such a Charming Resort.

There is a good sized Paddock adjoining the Gardens, which has been utilised as a Recreation Ground for children, and is largely taken advantage of throughout the year. Mr. and Mrs. H. Walker are the Caretakers of the Hall and Gardens.





Agscoughy's Gardens

A VIEW IN THE GARDENS.

Gifts to Ayscoughfee.

AMONGST the gifts which have been made to the Ayscoughfee Committee have been some Thirty Pictures, presented to Spalding by Mr. Edward Gentle, of London (a native of Spalding and formerly in business in the town), and now exhibited in the Drawing Room of the Hall. These pictures are as under:—

“The Scheldt, Texel Island”; “Lynton, North Devon”; “Near Skegness, Lincolnshire”; “The Shepherdess”; “Children on the Beach—old Hastings”; “Leaving Port” (after Clarkson Stanfield); “Boats near Rottingdean, Sussex”; “Fishing Boats near Brixham, Devon”; “The ‘Glen’”; “The Toll Gate” (winter); “Farmstead and Church” (winter); “Portsmouth Harbour”; “Fruit,” Artist unknown; do. do.; Chromo Litho; do.; “Frigate and Dutch Galliot, off Dover”; Portrait of Mr. Gentle, by Tanquery, Paris; “Sawbridgeworth Meadows”; “The Corn Field,” painted by J. Kinnaird; “Homeward Bound, off the North Foreland”; “Deal Luggers Racing to a Vessel on the Goodwin Sands”; “Fishing Boats at Sea” (sunrise); “Interior of Milan Cathedral,” Artist Unknown; “Entrance to the Port of Ostend”; “Off the Coast of Devon”; Chromo Litho—“Children and Bird’s Nest”; “Near Brixham”; “Fishing Smack off Harwich,” by J. Moore, Ipswich; “Off Ferrol.”

Mrs. Johnson, the former owner of the property, contributed two valuable Oil Paintings, these being Portraits of her late Husband and herself.

Alderman Jackson, of Grimsby, a native of Spalding, has given a presentation portrait of himself, and a collection of objects, including a Miniature Ship made by himself; and interesting Old Weapons and Curios gathered from various parts of the world.

A Bedstead upon which our late Queen (then Princess Victoria) slept at Wansford, when on her way to visit Burghley House, Stamford, is in one of the upper rooms, having been presented by a Townsman.

A pair of fine Swans (also the gift of a Townsman) were presented to the Committee and placed in the Lake, where they were for some time the admiration of the visitors, but in consequence of the limited water space, they died in the

course of a few months. One was preserved, and is now in the Hall.

One of the original objects was that the Hall should be utilised in part as a Museum and Picture Gallery, and the gifts already received will form the nucleus of such a collection.

Admission to Ayscoughfee.

Ayscoughfee Gardens are open throughout the year from 9 a.m. till dusk; Sundays excepted, when the hours during which the public are admitted are from 12 to 1 and 3 to 5 o'clock.

The Charge for Admission is 3d., but assistants engaged in business may secure tickets for the season at 1s. each. In other cases, single tickets are issued at 2s. each, and family tickets at 5s. each for the season. The last-mentioned includes visitors staying in the house.

There is, however, Free Admission every Saturday, from 2 o'clock till 7.



A Spalding Legend.

“The Maid of Ayscoughfee.”

BY RICHARD HARRIS, K.C.

WHATEVER virtues men possess,
 They've but one sin—'tis Selfishness.
 From this most fecund of all roots,
 Majestic, towering *Pride* upshoots :
 A self-embracing growth, so narrow
 'Twould scarce give shelter to a sparrow.
 With arms upstretched will *Greed* implore,
 And worship God by asking more ;
 But *Outstretched*, like the cedar tree,
 Is wide extending *Sympathy*.
 While Selfishness is Heaven inclined,
 Religion looks to poor mankind.
 This Truth, in time, all men will know ;
 This hateful Sin my tale will show.

There stands, in Spalding's ancient town,
 A house of high and weird renown ;
 Its history bears you far away
 To Thorold, Earl of Mercia's day.
 What deeds were done in those old times,
 What virtues practised or what crimes,
 Need not be told—enough for me
 The later days of Ayscough-fee.

But e'en these days are too remote,
 For Spalding's monuments to note :
 The Church, hard by, has many a name
 Which modest Worth denied to Fame ;
 While oft the Sculptor's willing tool
 Prolongs the mem'ry of a fool ;
 But gentleness and patient serving,
 Brave Self-denial, Love unswerving,—
 Not these compose the worthy jingle
 Where pious phrase and falsehood mingle !—
 Sweet Satires on the dear departed,
 Odd fragments from the broken-hearted ;
 Thus Mem'ry, anxious to atone
 Gives poor neglected Love—a stone !

Oblivion's dust-heap ! Only *Mind*
 Leaves monumental *Thoughts* behind.
 No name, no fame, and no inscription,
 No moss-grown truth eked out with fiction,
 Can here be found on stone or wall
 To tell what once was known to all,

In vain the anxious wanderer searches
 This glorious pride of Lincoln churches ;
 In all that pile so grand and hoary,



SPALDING PARISH CHURCH.

There's not a record of her story ;
 Nor sign of where her dust may be—
 The once fair maid of Ayscough-fee.

Her father was a lordly knight,
 Lordly in nature as in height ;
 Princely in rank, of royal blood,
 Whose famous sires the Danes withstood.
 He felt the thrill in every vein
 Of that dear fame men die to gain,
 And he was proud as proud could be
 Of that fair maid of Ayscough-fee.

In all the mother you could trace
 The high distinction of her race :
 If *Love* the dame had ever known,
 'Twas like what sculptor gives to stone,
 Unhallowed, passionless, and chill,
 Fit subject for a tyrant will.

O *Love*, unless thou reign supreme,
 Thou'rt but a puppet or a dream,
 A shapeless phantom of the brain,
 Which restless *Hope* pursues in vain ;
 Let once the glow of love be lost,
 And *Life* will harden like a frost.

The maid was fair—'tis not my duty
 To give each item of her beauty :
 All *Spalding* knows that sweet blue eyes
 Will cause more longing than surprise ;
 And tresses of the golden hue
 Will go right well with eyes of blue.

But her chief beauty was expression,
 The gracious calm of self-possession.
 Men saw and loved, as men must do,
 And lord and knight came there to woo.
 But she was not the maid to win
 By boots and spurs and warlike din ;
 These blustering lovers might as soon
 Have wooed a meteor or the moon,
 As this sweet pride of womankind,
 For they were matter, she was mind.

No *Love* had purified their passion,
 For *Love* is not a thing of *Fashion*.
 And so they passed in brave review,
 A noble band, but none she knew :—
 'Twas strange—and sad—mysterious, too :
 She would not wed what'er might be,—
 This lovely maid of *Ayscough-fee*.

Now *Love*, that ever scorns control,
 (What mortal chains can bind the soul ?)
 It had, in that despotic day,
 As now, its own peculiar way.
 It comes like lightning ; like the breeze,
 The still small whisper in the trees ;
 It comes like music from the shell—
 But how or whence ?—Can any tell ?
 And can what's called "the inner sense,"
 Be closed to its sweet influence ?

She loved ! and girl-like loved full well—

(Alas ! that I should fear to tell !)—
 She loved—No knight of high estate—
 No Baron—no one worldly great—
 But one who yet possessed some grace
 Beyond the pride of rank or race.
 He was—the Chaplain ! Heaven forgive !
 For maids must love if maids must live.

But who, I wonder, would engage
 To tell that anxious father's rage ?
 He stormed ; he raved ; each word he spoke
 They feared an apoplectic stroke.
 He cursed his daughter and her mother ;
 He swore they leagued with one another :
 Leagued only to disgrace his name,
 And bring his honoured race to shame ;
 He cursed all round and got much worse
 When there was no one else to curse.

At last, more calm, paternal power
 Consigned his daughter to the tower :
 The tower that e'en to-day you see
 O'erlooks the stately Ayscough-fee.

But he who caused this sad commotion
 Will have to cross " the briny ocean."
 O ! had the father met him now,
 With anger reeking on his brow,
 This lover had in shorter time
 Been sent to some remoter clime.

Now, in these conflicts with our fate,
 Prudence oft comes a little late.
 She came to this ingenuous youth
 Just when sweet Maud confessed the truth
 And then 'twas better to depart
 Than break that anxious father's heart.

Ah me ! e'en Priests, if men, are human,
 And yield their hearts to lovely woman.
 They find, like us, each sweet temptation
 Adjusted to the situation,
 And all must own the dear, sweet truth,
 That Love is still supreme in Youth.

O, Love, I would for mere completeness,
 Thy power were equal to thy sweetness.
 Then hadst thou stayed the stern command
 That doomed him to a foreign land,
 Where lonely grief and jungle fever
 Destroyed his earthly hopes for ever.

But who can tell if Love survives
 The shock that ends our mortal lives ?
 The moment that his soul was free,
 'Twas with the maid of Ayscough-fee.



YE OWL TOWER.

Alas ! foul murder does not need
 A dagger's point to do the deed :
 Unkindness, like a poisoned dart,
 Will pierce and rankle in the heart ;
 And grief will wear the life away,

Though men may drink and maidens pray,
 If Love's sweet law had governed men,
 There never had been need of ten.
 Disorder reigned as though a legion
 Had broken from th' infernal region.
 The father fierce, the scowling mother,
 Were pitted one against the other.

When winter came with mournful howling,
 Like some wild beast in hunger prowling,
 'Twas certain Death's dark wing was nearing,
 Though Pride was far above all fearing.
 The death watch ticked distinct and clear,
 At dusk the doleful owls drew near,
 The cock crew strangely in the night,
 The bats wheeled low their darksome flight—
 What need of these? Though signs they were—
 The seal of Heaven was fixed *on her*.

On New Year's Eve they sadly hear
 The bells ring out that fateful year :
 But when they ceased their clam'rous glee
 There was no maid of Ayscough-fee !

And now what boots it to relate
 The wretched parents' awful fate ?
 The course of Nature, who can stay it ?
 Pride has its price, and men must pay it.
 The general woes of human kind
 Are but the whistling of the wind :
 Some special ill excites our wonder,
 And shakes us like a shock of thunder—
 Such shock was theirs ; and devastation
 Mocked at their idle lamentation.
 Life's flickering light no longer burned—
 To smoke and shadow all was turned.

One night, a rude and blustrous night,
 When clouds rush on with headlong flight ;
 And now the moon her pathway clears,
 Then in an instant disappears,
 (So Fortune shines on mortal schemes,
 So vanish Fortune and our dreams) !
 They wandered silent in despair
 Along the walk, which *still is there*,
 Where many a lofty cedar grew
 And hedgerows clipped, of sable yew.
 And then, enrobed in golden haze,
 A glorious vision met their gaze !
 And, sudden as the flight of bird,
 The whirr of unseen wings was heard.
 In all her beauty, sweetly fair,

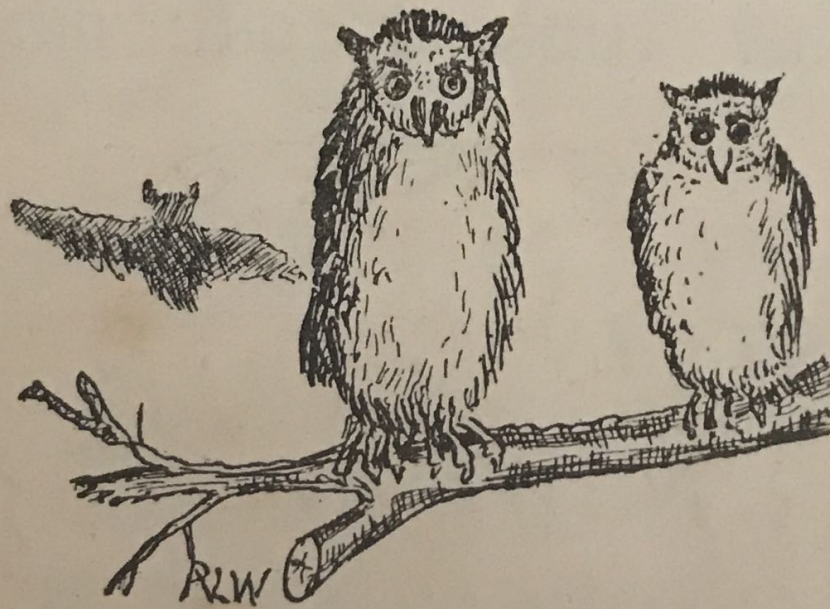
Just as of old she wandered there,—
 Passed by, with love that still could be,
 That beauteous maid of Ayscough-fee !

The stern man trembled—ne'er till now
 Had fear bedewed that haughty brow :
 And *She*, the cold hard thing of Pride ?—
 She gave one little scream and died !

And then 'twas said the Knight began
 To be a changed and better man :
 If so, it shows us all anew
 What mighty things a ghost can do !
 With most men, when their days diminish,
 They scarce begin before they finish.
 The good Knight found, at his last breath,
 That " Life was earnest "—so was Death.

Some folks there are in every nation
 Who " simply ask for information " ;
 And they'll demand (politely so),
 " Dear writer, how came you to know ? "
 To them in all good faith I say,
 It came in a most curious way :
 Ther is an owl house near that walk,
 And owls, though wise, do sometimes talk :
 The owls knew all, and well they might,
 They are so often out at night,
 And, as I'm somewhat meditative,
 I speak their language like a native—
 'Twas they who told the tale to me
 Of this fair maid of Ayscough-fee.





THE OWLS WHO TOLD THE TALE.

Lincolnshire, Boston, and

Spalding = =



Free Press.

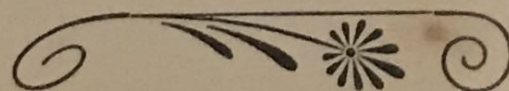
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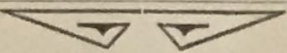
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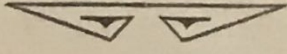


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