

## The Old House, (Norton Cottage).

Information relating to the Painting of Norton Cottage the old house that I was born in, is a three story high cottage opposite the Old village hall in Bugbrooke High Street, along with other information, to give you some idea as what life was like in those days of the past, as well as being born and raised during the second world war years, with rationing etc.

I was to be the fourth child out of seven born to Walter and Agnes Clark. I have written down for a record of my early recollections to the best of my knowledge, as to what life was like with the entire goings on at the time, along with memories of the Second World War, and the affects that it had on the family etc.

Our house consisted of a small scullery come lean to out the back, with a ground floor room that was used for a front room or best room, as they did in those days, behind the front door was a flight of stairs that led to a first floor bed room, and from this room another flight of stairs to the top floor.

Some of my earliest memories that I recall, was when lying in my cot in one of the bedrooms of this old house, was seeing many mice running about across the floor, this was when things were very quiet, the mice I did not mind but when the odd rat came out of some of the holes it was a different matter.

The pump for drinking water was attached to the front wall of the house; the well was under the floorboards in the front room, for I remember them opening it up to test the water along with inspecting it when Sid and Myra were taken ill with Diphtheria. It was said that the evacuees were to bring many different complaints with them when they came to Bugbrooke; Diphtheria was only one of them.

The bucket toilet was outside at the end of the path that led past the side of the house, in the early days it was always collected and emptied by a man with a horse and cart during the night, (hence the name of the midnight cart), or a hole was dug in the garden and it was buried.

Next to the toilet was the coal barn, followed by a lean too that Dad kept his Norton motorcycle under.

After a very heavy rain storm, or a spell of wet weather, the water from the well would taste really horrible, also after the Monday wash day when everyone religiously did the weekly wash, the water always tasted very soapy on a Tuesday, (good old days!), this was also the same on Saturdays, after the Friday bath night, for this was the once a week job to keep you clean as they said, on ordinary days it was a quick wash using a bowl of water, for nearly every house in the village had a wash stand with a jug and bowl somewhere in the house.

After the illness of Diphtheria that struck our family, plus the effect that drinking the water from the well had on our health, it was later deemed unfit for drinking after it had been inspected.

I remember that we were bought water for a time in milk churns for the use of drinking or whatever after it had been boiled.

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Dad told me in later years that the reason most men in the village drank beer, or cold tea, as it was sterile and did not make you ill, for in those days' men could not afford to be ill when they had a family to support.

I was told that on the odd occasion Dad gave me some watered down beer with a teat on the end of a beer bottle, much to some peoples disgust, he said it did me more good than the rubbish from out of the well mixed with milk, not only that if I was to throw the bottle from out of the cot or pram breaking the bottle, there were plenty more beer bottles to replace the one that got broken.

I was told that the average hard working man drank on average of eight pints of beer a day, and this number could be doubled on Saturdays and Sundays, and on the odd occasion when they had drank more than a belly full as they said in those days, this was when they had drank more than they usually drank, one had to keep well out of their way, for some of the men could be very violent if and when upset, even if you looked or stared at them was enough to set them off, some of the men's wives were subjected to absolute hell all over drink and alcohol, in those days there was no refuge for them to go to like there is today!.

Mrs Stanton who kept the Five Bells public house told me in the early days she and her husband were forever changing barrels soon after opening time, due to the amount of beer drank by several dozen men, be it twelve to one o'clock midday opening or the six to half ten opening in the evening.

Us young lads growing up during this period soon learnt who we could go near, or who we had keep away from, or it could be a painful experience other wise, for most of these old men in their younger days, had served in the Army in many campaigns or wars around the Globe, they took no cheek what so ever, one had a sore ear very quick if you did not watch it, or have your wits about yourself.

Mr George Freestone from Blisworth said that in most villages someone spend all day brewing beer of some sort, hence so many beer houses in the past, the first brew was for the men to drink, the second was for the women to drink, and the final and last brew from the hops was for the children, for most of the well water was unfit to drink that came from the natural water table, especially those wells that were near to a Church Yard or farm yard, the only water that they trusted were proven natural springs from where people had drank from along with a record of no one being taken ill from it.

Years later I was told about a certain woman from Bugbrooke, who waylaid the wife of the Landlady from one of the Public Houses in the village, for she was to complain very bitterly about them taking all the hard ernt money from her husband, leaving him with not much money left to feed the family and to pay the bills etc, as they had took it all from him by selling him Beer, along with getting him very drunk and uncontrollable, the said Landlady told her to meet her in the Church and they would try to sort things out in there, instead of on the street where every one was listening, she made her promise that she would not tell her husband or anyone else of the goings on that were to take place.

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From then on when her husband came into the Public House after he had drunk a few pints of very strong beer, she would sell him slops that she had saved, and put the money to one side for his wife, along by short changing him, that she put into his wife saving pot, it was to be money she had, that she never would have seen, and this Landlady had done the same for several other men's wives whose husbands drank very heavy.

Regarding personal hygiene the clothing was a lot to be desired that some folk wore, even after the Friday night bath, unless they washed or changed the clothing that they wore from day to day, they still smelt the same, one old farmer in Bugbrooke had a nick name of Tin Britches, for what with all the cow muck on his trousers along with the milk that he spilt on them while carrying the milk up the yard to the Dairy, they were stiff and shone just like a sheet of tin, (Hence his nick name), if and when he stood next to a fire was something else, for they would start to steam as they dried out, along with giving out a wonderful aroma.

Regarding the smell of different folk in the village I would notice this as a young child; this was when standing in a queue at the bake house, while waiting for the Sunday roast to come from out of the oven.

I recall a very bad hail storm in my very early year's, for at the time the hail stones were about the size of a small hens eggs, some came down the chimney and shot out of the grate across the front room floor.

When the storm cleared everywhere was white with these large hailstones, due to the very strong winds that came with this storm, the hailstones had drifted up level to the top of the low wall outside of Mr Campions Farm House.

Mr Fred (Painter) Lovell was kept busy repairing windows and roofs for quite a long period after this bad storm.

Mr Fred Lovell had to repair our cottage roof due to the heavy hail stones breaking many of the slates on it, I was told that he left the ladder that led up to the roof and while he had gone to fetch some more slates, I had gone and climbed this ladder and got onto the roof gully between Heygate's house and our cottage, a Mr Cattell who worked for Heygate's put a ladder up from the road side as Mr Lovell came up the other side for they thought that I may have fallen down if frightened.

One thing that stuck in my mind, was when Bugbrooke was subjected to an earth quake, for I remember the dust etc coming away from the wall next to the wooden beam that went from one side of the room to the other, along with staying up and not going to bed at nightfall, for we all stayed in the front room until it was deemed safe to go back upstairs, I was told later on in life there were quite a few after shocks that followed it hence the reason for staying downstairs.

I was to witnessing many of the old buildings in this area of Bugbrooke being pulled down, near to where we lived, there was to be lots of old timbers from the roofs of these building as Dad purchased most of it to be used as kindling on the house fires, especially the copper fire on washday, mother got through quite a lot of wood boiling up the washing.

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When they pulled down the Wagon and Horses public house, an old pair of wooden Stocks was to be found in the construction of the roof timbers, it was believed that they were once the village stocks.

Mr Campion the farmer did a swap with father, in exchange for these old stocks, he gave Dad some steel posts and sheets of tin, that came from a old Dutch barn that he was dismantling, it enabled Dad to build us an air raid shelter in our garden with them, for it would have been a shame to have burnt them, (These old stocks stood for many years in front of Mr Campion's home).

Dad dug a very large hole in our garden to erect this Air raid Shelter, as I well remember all the sand that came from out of it, when he had finished it was all piled back on top of it.

If my memory is correct when it was wet and rainy it would have up to two feet of water or more in it. (The Germans would only have to come on dry days or nights?).

It must have had some water in it on one particular evening, for Dad took all of us half way up Smiths Lane next to the large Oak Tree, he laid a tarpaulin on the ground, and up and over a rope making a cheese shaped tent, that we all got into during a night raid on Coventry.

I remember when we moved up to the other house at Camp Hill Dad threw all the rubbish down the hole that this shelter left when it was dismantled before he levelled the ground out, I do know he buried a large tin of Luminas silver paint, (looking back I think that this paint was Radio Active, for it was the Radiation from it that made it glow in the dark) he used to put this paint on different posts within the garden and on the corners of walls of the house, this was so one could see your way about in the blackout during dark nights, I know that he painted all the corners of the walls and posts down Gilkes Yard with it, as well as several Telegraph and Electricity post about the village.

It was a standing joke within the village about this paint and Dad, for one night some was to ask as to what he was doing when painting some posts etc, he replied that he was (Normalizing), you can well imagine as to what was said in the local Public Houses, especially when some were to ask others as to what Normalizing meant.

I personally would paint Ghostly figures for a laugh on the whitewashed cowshed walls, you could not see them in the day, but they stood out in the dark of night, and caused quite a stir at times, we did not know them days that the stuff was poisonous and dangerous, for all the parts inside the aircraft were painted with it that Dad worked on, so the crew could see their way about in the darkness of night, along with all the instruments Clocks, Altitude Meters, Fuel Gauges, False Horizon instruments, Gun Sights, along with many control levers etc, within the aircraft so Dad said at the time, but it also made our lives a lot easier to get about during the Blackout, when he had used it out and about.

Other things I remember was of Dad and Mr Barford from the Garage pouring petrol into beer bottles along with strips of rubber and bunging the tops up with corks and rags, ( Looking back if the Germans ever came I don't know how long they would have lasted after throwing the first one or two of these at them ?).

For me as a young boy growing up in this period of the second World war, every day was so exciting, due to the fact as this area of the village seemed to have a great deal of activity going on all the time, what with the activity of the Army moving in and about the village, as well as the intake of the evacuees that were brought to the village from Northampton Castle Station by the red Corporation Buses, these buses pulled up in front of Bugbrooke School, and the evacuees were taken in to be sorted out, and then taken to the families within the village, where they had to stay for the duration of the War years, some of them brought with them many illnesses, that were spread through the village with devastating effects.

This was due to the fact that many of them brought not only several infectious illnesses with them, but some were to be lousy with Fleas and Nits etc, due to the conditions that some of them had been subjected to, this was due to all the Bombing of different parts of London, some had lost everything that they possessed, all they had left were the clothes that they stood in, one complaint that came with them was to be Diphtheria.

Myra one of my elder sisters, along with my eldest brother Sid, were to be taken ill with Diphtheria, but Myra was to lose her life at the isolation Hospital at Staverton, this was about the same time as the evacuation of Dunkirk, for I recall all the soldiers coming from out of the railway station at Weedon, as we came through on our way back to Bugbrooke from the hospital, Mrs Tarry the Coal Merchants wife usually drove us back and forth with their Taxi, on the odd time that I was taken to see Myra.

During this period of my early days I recall being very lonely as I was not allowed to mix with other people and children, but thanks to Mrs Gerude Dowson, Granny Jeffs, and old Bragg Robbins, as I was taken out and about by them.

I recall a day in Bugbrooke Co-op when being pleased to see someone my own age when going over to the shop with mother.

Whereby I was kicked across the shop out of the way by this other young person's mother, as it was done through the fear of catching something from me of what Sid and Myra had got.

Dad was serving in the home guard during this period in time, his job was armourer as I recall all the rifles and guns being chained to the wall in our front room, during this period I would like to watch the home guard on parade, doing all sorts of arms drill in the yard in front of Mr Champion's house. This was until Mr Surridge the platoon Sergeant see me, then I would be told to Sod off back home by him.

During this period Mr Champion and all the other farmers in Bugbrooke were asked to build hay or straw ricks in the centre of large fields or to leave farm implements or to erect railway sleepers or posts up out of the ground. (I was told in later years this was done to help stop German gliders from finding a safe place to land).if and when they intended to invade.

I remember the home guard cutting out long poles from out of one of the spinneys that was adjacent to a field named Netherecote, for they sharpened both ends of these poles, (These were to stick in the ground under any invading German Parachutist so that they would impale themselves on them when descending from the sky).

One exciting day was when a very large Silver barrage Balloon came over Bugbrooke that had got loose from some where, the Home Guard were chasing it along with trying to shoot it down or to puncture it to let the Gas out, it had a steel cable that it was dragging behind it, this enable them to get control over it before it went into the next parish of Kislingbury.

One thing as a child I had not noticed up until 1945, was that during my very early years of growing up in Bugbrooke due to the Black Out that was in force, it was not until after we had moved up Camp Hill, and the Second World War had ended, before I had the delight of seeing street lights being on, as well as coming from all the house windows, during this same period I had never heard the sound of the Church Bells ringing, for they were only to have been rung to signal to the Home Guard that a invasion was taking place, so that was another delight to experience, after the war was over, one German prisoner who worked on one of the local farms, said to me I always know when it is Monday, for they always ring out wash day, for that was another ritual that had gone on for years before I was born, was started back up after the war on Monday evenings as though nothing had happened.

I really looked forward to the day that I could start school!, for the period just before I was old enough to do so, I had sat out side of it on the double kerbing, listening to the other children laughing and playing during break time etc, along by being told that I had got to go to school at some time in the future, the day came for me to attend after Easter 1944, I was to find myself in Miss Wrights Class (Kate), for me having to sit still and keep quiet and listen, was extremely very difficult to do so after running about on Mr Campion's farm, amongst all the horses, cows, chickens, ducks, geese, sheep etc, to be chastised in this manner I found it to be very difficult, for the first morning in class, Miss Wright was to hit me on the back of my hand catching my knuckles with the sharp edge of a ruler, thus making them bleed, digressing to Sunday school, hanging on the wall in the Chapel was a picture of a man kneeling saying his prayers in a prison, he was looking up at a window that had a cross within its construction, the windows in Bugbrooke school were of the same shape, at the time I really though until I had been told different, that I had done something wrong and had been stuck in prison, was the impression Miss Wright had on me, from then on it was to be quite a job to get me to go to school after this episode.

What with getting into trouble and getting the cane through taking my Gas Mask off during the period of reciting the time tables, that we had to recite until we knew them of by heart, these were written on the Black Board, while reciting the lenses of the Gas Mask misted up with vapour restricting my vision, hence removing it to clear or clean the lenses along by rubbing them with a half potato that helped to stop them doing so, this we carried in the Gas Mask Box, I often wonder as to what the teacher could really hear, as our voices must have been very muffled, let alone to understand our lovely Rural Northamptonshire accent that we had at the time, it was alright for the teacher to stand there without wearing a gas mask on giving us orders, for if and when she wore a Gas Mask we could not make head nor tail as to what she said or was on about, looking back it was just like a mad house, health wise these Gas Masks had a coat of Asbestos both side of the Charcoal that was within them, this was to stop it catching fire in the event from the heat of a Bomb Blast!.

Uncle Harry Able wrote me out a set of time tables to help me out in my early days of learning, that I have to this day, different to the ones we had on the back of our exercise books at school!

The lovely Box that contained this Gas Mask of mine! Was not designed for going over Amblers Wall that was adjacent to the school playground, for if and when we kicked a ball over, nine times out of ten I crushed the dammed thing or ripped it open. One way or another I seemed constantly in trouble over these boxes, for having to ask for a replacement time and time again, my sisters Gas Mask Box was covered in fancy Wall Paper along with girly things in it alongside of her Gas Mask, the other thing about my Gas Mask it was Blue in Colour with a Red protruding nose piece like Mickey Mouse, if and when wearing it especially when reciting the Times Tables or getting slightly out of breath while wearing it, for when breathing out very hard it would make very rude noises, I could with practice make lovely tunes like those that come from any wind instrument, this did not do me any favours when doing so in Class, they were not very pleasant things to wear for any amount of time, for not only did they mist up, the moisture would run out from under them, all down your neck and body, if you were none to clean they would leave tide marks on your skin where the moisture had run, it was so lovely and gave us so much freedom when the day came that we no longer had to carry them about with us.

It was not only the time tables that we had to chant repetitively from off the black board, until we knew them of by heart, but about £s –s - d of the day.

4 farthings to a penny, 48 to a shilling, 960 to a £.

2 half penny's to a penny, 24 to a shilling, 480 to a £.

12 penny's to a shilling, 240 to a £.

4 three penny pieces to a shilling, 80 to a £. Some of them were silver three penny pieces, for they used to put these in our Christmas Puddings.

2 sixpenny pieces to a shilling, 40 to a £.

20 shilling to a £.

10 two shilling pieces to a £, (Florin was the name for this coin).

8 two shillings and sixpence coins, (Half Crowns) to a £.

1 Crown (five shilling coin) 4 to a £, (Five Shillings equalled (1 Dollar \$) them days).

2 Ten shilling notes, to a £.

There were Sovereigns (1£) and half sovereigns (10s) still in use.

The 5£ note was the size of half a page of A4.

Along with being shown the Spade Guiney, or Half Spade Guiney, as some of the old timers had them fixe to their pocket watch chains.

A Guiney was one pound one shilling.

The hours we had spend doing mathematical sums with these old tables, looking back it seemed a complete waste of time especially when they changed to the Metric system, (sense at last), I think it was only used to confuse our common wealth friends that we traded with.

We were to spend hours learning about all the countries in our Empire, where they were on the large Map of the World that was always to one side of the black board.

We had to learn the names of the capital Cities of them, along with the names of the most important people that were in charge etc, the names of their currency that they used the name of all the mountains, rivers, deserts, forests, and all the different types of animals, and where they were situated in the world.

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Since those days our Empire had become a Commonwealth, almost all of the names of counties etc have changed along with every thing else!

Even our weight and measures that we spent hour after hour learning was swept aside when the metric system came to be, the list is endless of the stuff we had to learn that no longer applies in this modern changing world of ours, along with all the measurements of the land, Chains, Perches, Furlongs, Poles (Five and a half yards square in a Pole of land), 40 Poles to a Rood, 4 roods to an Acre.

During this period in Bugbrooke the Army came around collecting any cast iron pots that people could spare for the war effort, along with Bed Ends, Aluminium saucepans, they were to take away all of the iron wrought gates from the front of the houses, if there were any iron railings they cut them off, as well as any metal chains, the only metal gates that were spared in Bugbrooke were the ones in the front of Bugbrooke Hall the home of Mrs Harrison the Rectors Mother, I think she was more than they dare take on, for she was a very forceful woman and stood her ground.

These gates still stand to this day.

The Nit Nurse would visit the school on a regular basis, we would have to go out the class into the lobby, one after the other, until she had inspected us all, those of us that were found to have fleas or nits, were sent home to have them treated, along with having to have a very short haircut, mother would hold our heads over an old News Paper on the table, as she combed through our hair with a brass Nit Comb, she would crush any nits or fleas with the back of her thumb nails, they would go with quite a cracking sound when doing so, it was not always the dirty people that manage to get nits and fleas, even if you kept your head nice and clean as mother did us, we still managed to get them now and again, Mother would always rinse our hair in Vinegar mixed with water, it not only did the job of keeping the livestock from out of our hair, but made it very shiny, especially if it was washed in soft water from out of the water but, it would feel very comfortable and soft afterwards.

After nit or flea treatment when going back to school, you would be subjected to a chant of, Ha, Ha, He, Ha, Ha, Clarkes, Gone and Had Nits, but one did not have long to wait before those that were chanting were to get them, not as I would remark back in that way as they did to me, for there were very few that were to get away without catching them, if any, due to the circumstances of the time that we were subjected to.

During the break times at Bugbrooke School, us young boys, we were not permitted to mix with the older boys, or to go near their playground, all us infants at the time had to share the playground with the senior girls, for me as a young boy watching the girls skipping fascinated me, not only of all the rhythms that they skipped to, but the many songs that they sung while skipping, (My Mother said we never should play with the Gypsies in the Wood), (Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Sailor etc),

Some times they would use two skipping ropes at the same time, it was very rare they got tangled up in the ropes; some were so quick they were never caught out in the games that they played.

It was not until later years when I was one of the British Army's Light Middle Weight Boxing Champions, that I was to find out how hard and strenuous skipping could be, for it was part of my Boxing training.

I never thought for one moment during the periods of attending the youth club that was held in Bugbrooke Chapel, when Fred Curtis used to train us young lads to box, that I would have ever become so good at it, so I really had Mr Fred Curtis to thank for those early lessons.

Getting back to the evacuees that were brought into Bugbrooke, they brought a Jewish boy to our house by the name of Thomas Trott, I was told in later years the reason was, that they thought at the time, due to aunt Emily, Dads Sister, whom was married to Mr Harry Able, a Jewish man by birth.

They thought that we should have known all about his Jewish requests in life, he was quite a likable young lad, and settled down really well with our family, but his mother came and insisted that he was to stay with a Jewish family, instead of where he was, even though our cousins, Joe, and Fred Able, spent most of their time living with us, as aunt Emily had since passed away, hence them living with us.

I do not think Thomas Trott's Mother liked mother giving him Egg and Bacon for breakfast, or something on those lines.

Mrs Lora Clark (Dads relative) from Gilkes Yard took in a John French, and John Leach, Mr and Mrs Osborn next to the Chapel in the High Street, took in a boy named Christopher Hazelwood, Mr and Mrs Barford at the Garage at the bottom of Butts Hill took in a boy named Leo Beavis, Mr and Mrs Love who lived in a cottage to the rear of our old house took in two Jewish boys I justly do not remember their Christian names but I think their surname was something like Levee or Levine.

There were many more evacuees within the village, but the ones I have mentioned I was to spend quite a great deal of time with, except the boys who lived at Mr and Mrs Loves, (During the War years Mr Love's job was a Bus Conductor, along with being a Special Constable during his time from normal employment), I think he liked wearing a uniform!.

I know the Sunday school rooms were used for one sect or different religion to the rest of us, as the Chapel rooms were used for another separate religious group, for those interested in this information there may be someone who had kept a record as to what was what from those days.

During the period when all the evacuees were in the village, for a short period until things were sorted out, they would attend school either by having a week of mornings or a week of afternoons, shared with the village children, the elder children were encouraged to go around all the hedges in the local fields, collecting Black Berries and Rose Hips, this was still expected for a long period even after the War had ended for I have collected and done the same when I had grown up and was old enough, for when I did this we were paid three pence a pound for them, along by being given badges for those who had collected the most.

The school toilets were situated at the top of these playgrounds, they were in a very long Barn that stood in the Close or Playing Field, the access to the buckets were from a long row of doors to each toilet, Mr Joseph Hakes would regularly come with the horse and cart to empty them, it was a place that was out of bounds at all times to enter this barn, unless you were with a teacher, this would be when getting the goal posts and netting from out of it etc, for I remember all the very old long desks being stored in there that were used in my father days of schooling, along with the white line marker and white wash to mark the football pitch out with.

One group of lads happened to get into this barn at one time and tickled as they thought was one of the girls bottom with some stinging nettles, but it turned out to be one of the female teachers, there were to be some very painful hands after a good caning.

We were given a third of a pint of milk every day, that was supplied to the school by Mr Belgrove the Farmer and Coal Merchant from Bugbrooke Wharf, other things that we were given during these war years were certain bottles of vitamins etc, that we had to take home or our parents had to collect from the school,

During these early days of schooling it was not only the nit nurse that came to inspect us, but health visitors Doctors etc, that came and weighed everybody, along with giving us all medical examinations, even a school Dentist used to come and park in front of Mr Campion's house where we all had to go and have our teeth looked at.

In the period just before we were to leave our old house and move up Camp Hill, the soldiers along with all their equipment were building up in the village getting ready for the Normandy Landings so I was told, for some mornings when arriving at school the soldiers were to be putting all our desks back into place, as they had been sleeping on the class room floors, the close was out of bounds for us as it was full of light armoured vehicles and tanks,

When they did go they were to go over night, I was told that they made no noise what so ever, for it was such a surprise for most of the people that lived in this area to find that they were not there when they got out of bed in the morning, they were to leave a large Tent, along with several cooking stoves, one of these stoves stood for many years after, under a lean-to next to the village Hall, I was told that they took the fence down between the Close, and Bill and Mont Grants, and went down their Orchard onto the road when they left, the village was so quiet after they had gone, but it pleased some as they could once again get their Sunday dinner roasted at Barnes's bakery once again, for the period the army was in the village, the army had requisition it.

Also staying with us at times when they were on leave from the army, would be Joe and Fred Able my cousins, for I remember sitting up on the old copper taking to them as I watched them having a shave, Fred was to loose his life just after one of the Landings that he went on, and is buried some where in Belgium, I really missed him not being about.

During this period in time Joe's father Uncle Harry Abel, was living in the Old Toll House up on the Watling Street (A5),

Stanley Joseph Clark.

