

THIS TABLET  
SHEWETH EVERY PERSON'S RIGHT TO  
THE HEATH WHO LIVES OR OCCUPIES  
IN THE PARISH, BY THE DECISION OF  
LANCELOT SHADWELL COUNSELLOR IN  
THE HOUSE OF LORDS, BEING APPLIED  
TO WHEN THE 800*l* WAS PAID BY THE  
GOVERNMENT FOR THE TROOPS EXER-  
CISING THERE, HE GAVE HIS OPINION  
THAT EVERY PERSON MUST HAVE EQUAL  
SHARE WHO CUT WHINS AND FEED CAT-  
TLE THERE, SO WE HAD ALL 8*l* EACH  
THEN, AND EVER SINCE THE PARISH RE-  
CEIVE 5*l* A YEAR THE TROOPS BEING  
FEW, THIS 5*l* IS ALWAYS DIVIDED.

*Ablitt*

◀ *The stone tablet relating to the commoners' rights, on Nat Ablitt's cottage in the Street Rushmere St. Andrew.*

*Photo. A. R. J. Frost,  
A.I.B.P., A.R.P.S.*



*Drawing by Jennifer Kent*

## NAT ABLITT (1784-1865)

—*the Rushmere Eccentric*      By WALTER TYE

ALTHOUGH of humble origin, limited schooling and eccentric habits, Nat Ablitt, who rendered considerable service to Rushmere St. Andrew in early Victorian times, has every right to rank as a village worthy. Despite the fact, however, that he kept a voluminous diary and wrote a small book of poems, besides frequently writing to the press, very little is known about him in the parish to-day, except that he was the eccentric old Nat who had the tablet fixed on his cottage in the Street, testifying to the everlasting rights of the inhabitants to the heath.

Nat Ablitt was a striking example of 'The good is oft interred with their bones'. Fortunately, however, his diary, which reveals a wealth of detail about him, has recently come to life. There we see a man of wide interests, strange hobbies, an eccentric outlook. He was a prolific scribbler, a dabbler in science and, above

all, an outstanding commoner. Having read the diary, one cannot help concluding that Nat ranks as one of Rushmere's most interesting and lovable characters although obviously queer.

Actually, Nat was not a native of Rushmere St. Andrew at all, as often said. He was born and buried in the neighbouring parish of Kesgrave. It was after taking over the 46-acre holding of 'Little Roundwood' that he became more closely associated with the affairs of Rushmere St. Andrew.

The name of Ablitt was common enough in both Rushmere and Kesgrave 100 years ago. Five different families of Ablitt had small holdings in Rushmere at that time—some as outsetters. Besides 'Little Roundwood' the so-called 'Lattice Lands' were farmed by an Ablitt family during the middle of the last century.

It was on Kesgrave Heath that Nat



*Mr. Reginald Chaplin who has donated Nat Ablitt's tablet to the Parish Council for preservation.*

*Photo. A. R. J. Frost, A.I.B.P., A.R.P.S.]*

now I'm grown to hold the plough, and swing the glittering scythe, to mow John Barleycorn and load the jolting waggon; And now with grateful merry heart I'm proud to help the harvest home.'

Like many schoolboys in Victorian times Nat gradually became restless, wondering about the future. Being one of a family of seven boys, he saw little prospect in staying at home. And he so aptly commented, 'families grow, but farms don't'. With this in mind, he set off for America, which he chose to call 'Columbus land'. What he saw there seems to have been of greater moment to him than his own affairs, of which he said but little.

On returning home, Nat tried his hand at merchandise, the buying and selling of corn. This job, however, did not last long. Nat evidently was disgusted with the technique involved. 'When I try to buy,' he said, 'then everything is good, but when I offer the same for sale, it is said to be bad.' He then turned to farming, preferring to grow, rather than deal in, corn. With this in mind, he moved to 'Little Roundwood', situated on the boundary of Rushmere, not far away from 'Roundwood', once the home of Lady Nelson.

developed his extraordinary interest in nature, which stayed with him for life. When tending sheep as a boy on the Heath he had ample time to pore over the beauties and mysteries of nature that daily confronted his sensitive boyish mind. 'When the sheep laid down to rest', he too reclined—but not to sleep. Casting his eyes to the skies, he watched the rolling clouds driven before the winds, forecasting storms which, 'like the heavens' artillery rolled over the plains of Kesgrave'.

Neither was anything too insignificant to escape his notice and interest. Birds, bees and insects in general fascinated him. Eventually, however, shepherding and schooling (every other day) came to an end. As Nat later wrote in his Diary: 'Good father planned it so and

**F**ROM the day that Nat settled at 'Little Roundwood' he began to keep a sort of diary-cum-scrapbook, in which he kept records of experiments, newspaper cuttings, letters and, most intriguing of all, his personal opinions on all sorts of topics, chiefly religion, politics and local affairs. His first entry gives an inkling of his real interests:

*'Little Roundwood'  
as it appears today.*

*Photo. B. P. Bullard.*



*Nat Ablitt's cottages in the Street, Rushmere St. Andrew, which have  
recently been demolished.*

*Photo. A. R. J. Frost, A.I.B.P., A.R.P.S.*





In spite of all his eccentricities and unorthodox opinions, Nat basically was a man of sterling humanity, wide sympathies, stern independence and a great love for animals. When asked what man could best do to serve the Giver of our lives and nature, Nat replied: 'My nature and my reason call upon me to make as much happiness as I can around me. Submission, Thankfulness, No Suspicion, No Slander, Patience, Gratitude, Charity, whether to Jew, Christian or Turk.'

Nat seems to have had a poor opinion of Suffolk farmers, accusing them of 'stinginess to the poor'. He made one exception, however, the Biddells of Playford, for whom he had great respect. It was their kindness to their own farm labourers that most attracted Ablitt's attention. From all accounts, when their wives were confined, they were invited to share the master's dinner table for a month.

Amongst his many and varied activities Nat was a prolific scribbler, writing to the press on all sorts of topics, ranging from abstruse subjects such as theology and astronomy to the more mundane topics of 'Laying out a cemetery in Ipswich' and 'Pooping on the Heath'. He often wrote to high dignitaries, including the queen, begging her to prevent further spread of Roman Catholicism in the Anglican Church. The Ipswich doctors, too, came in for his invective. He strongly objected to them advising equestrian patients to ride on Rushmere Heath 'to take the smell away'. So annoyed was he over the matter, he broke out into verse:

'Pooping on the Heath

You must not poop in Ipswich, for so  
the Doctors say;

You must go on to Rushmere to take



*The Street, Rushmere St. Andrew.  
Photo. A. R. J. Frost, A.I.B.P., A.R.P.S.*

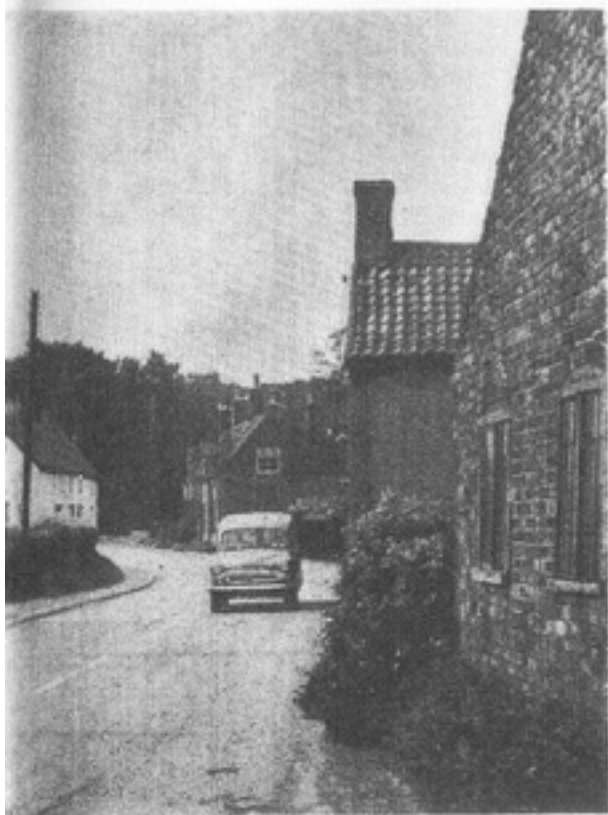
the smell away

We are so refined now, your pigs you  
must not slay

Pigs' blood produce the cholera and  
turn us all to clay.'

It was Nat's work as a prominent commoner in Rushmere that gave him his greatest claim to 'worthiness'. As far back as 1819 we find him assisting the Revd. Edge over the division and distribution of the 'Heath Money' paid by the War Office for their use of the Heath as a 'drill-ground'. Here is part of his record:

All the outsetters received the same,  
Kesgrave Farm, Cold Hall Farm, Decoy



Pond Farm and Tuddenham Farm. If a small part of the land laid in the Parish of Rushmere they had equal shares.

Amount accumulated	£740	18	6d.
Expenses occurred in obtaining it	...	67	3 5d.

Balance divided between  
84 occupants ... £673 15 1d.

The division of the Heath Money, with the constant usage of the soil from the pit is an everlasting right.'

It was during the middle of the last century that Nat took a leading part in defence of the commoners. In both the 1851 and 1861 conflicts between Lord Bristol and the Rushmere Commoners, Nat led the attack, supported by the

Schreibers of Roundwood and the Everetts of Villa Farm. In 1858, moreover, we find him securing deferred payments from the War Office for use of the Heath as a drill-ground.

Nat will longest be remembered, however, for having fixed the tablet relating to the commoners' rights, on his cottage in the Street, where he evidently lived between 1841 and 1866, when he died. The tablet was fixed in 1861 when Nat was an old man, 77 years of age. One can only conclude he had it fixed through pride of victory over the Heath, and as a permanent reminder to the parishioners of their rights. That he should not ask prominent Rushmerians to join with him in fixing the tablet is a further indication of his independence and eccentricity.

The only mention of the tablet in his diary was the name of the mason who fixed it and the expenses. Here is the entry:

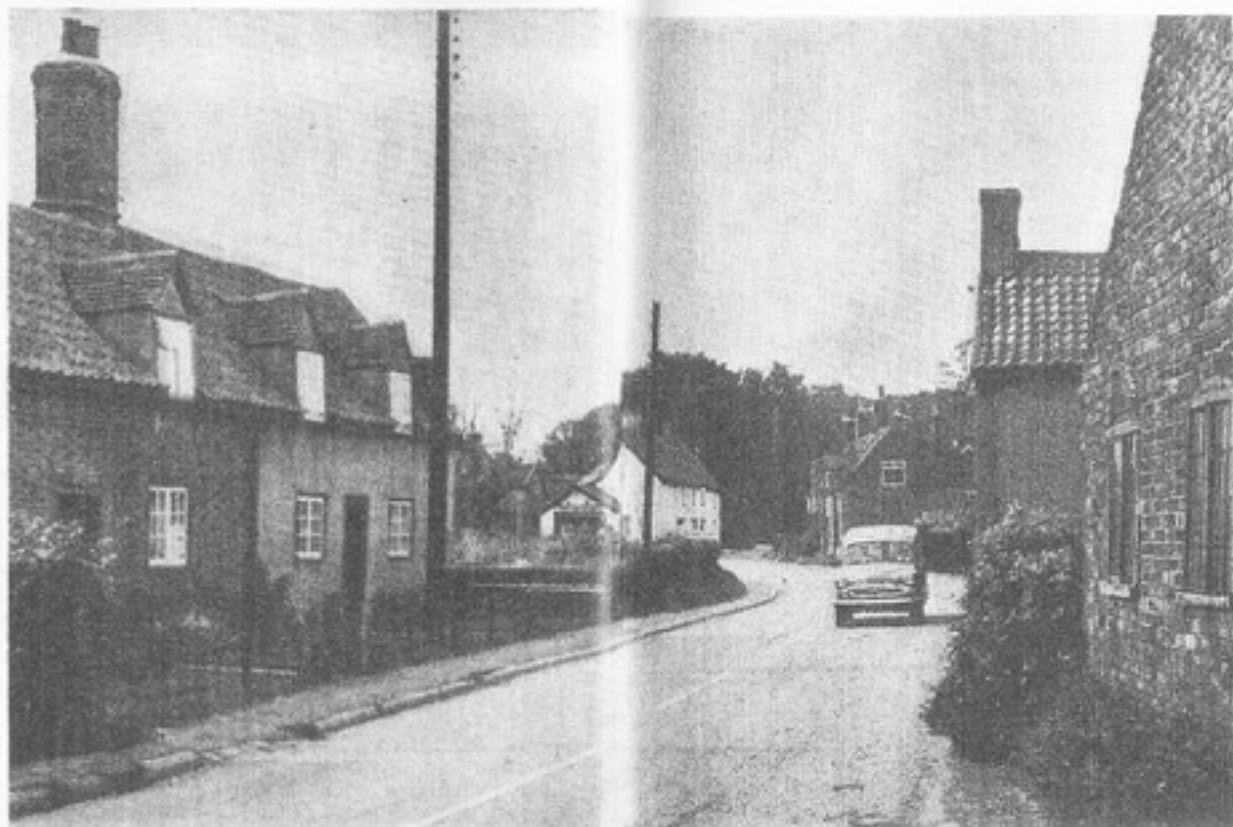
'Mr. Ablitt to James Williams.

A stone tablet was set up and fixed at the front of Mr. Ablitt's cottage in Rushmere Street to show the equal rights of all parishioners to the use of all other privileges belonging to the Heath—£2 10 0.

Signed—James Williams'.

In conclusion, now that the 'tablet cottage' has been demolished I appeal to the 'Commoners' Committee' and the parishioners in general, to ensure that the tablet is fixed in some suitable spot in the Parish, where it can be preserved and easily seen.

*I am indebted to Mr. B. E. King, of Brent Eleigh for loaning me Nat Ablitt's Diary, but for which this article would have been impossible.*



*The Street, Rushmere St. Andrew.*  
*Photo. A. R. J. Frost, A.I.B.P., A.R.P.S.*