The George Borrow Society Newsletter
No. 4: Christmas Special

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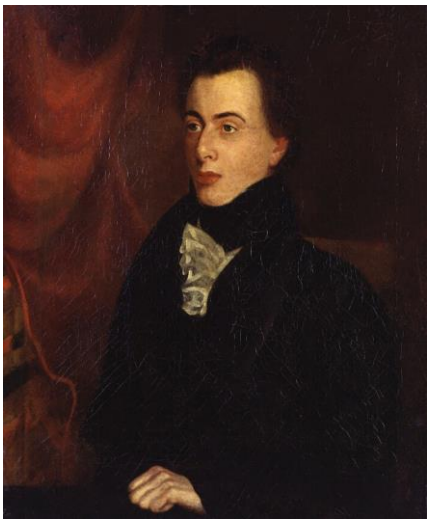


George Borrow by John Thomas Borrow, oil on canvas, circa 1821–1824, NPG 1651 © National Portrait Gallery, London.

The above portrait of George Borrow was painted by his brother John, a pupil of the great artist John Chrome, and the picture was exhibited by John in the 1821 *Norwich Society of*

Artists exhibition: George would be around 18. George talks of his brother in *Lavengro*, and you can view the above portrait at the National Portrait Gallery's website.

He's a little extra newsletter to cheer us all up after what's been a very unpleasant time. There's some Christmas articles, plus a few of our usual *Notes and Queries*.

Victorian Humour

In 1860 George Borrow, Mary and Henrietta moved to 22 Hereford Square, Brompton, London and George would remain there on and off for fourteen years. The local newspapers would run humorous stories during December for their readers, and it's quite likely that the Borrows would have heard some of the following. It was a gentler age when it came to humour of course...

> A young lady from the rural districts lately visited London with her beau. Getting into the omnibus for the first time she took her seat while her lover planted himself on the box with the driver. Very soon the conductor began to collect the fares, and approaching the rustic maiden, he said "Your fare miss?" The rural rosebud allowed a delicate pink to manifest itself upon her cheeks, and looked down in soft confusion. The conductor was rather astonished at this, but ventured to remark once more—"Your fare, miss?" This time the pink deepened to carnation as the rustic beauty replied, "'Deed, if I am good lookin', you hadn't ought to say it out aloud afore folks!"
>
> *West London Observer*, 9 December 1865

> A schoolmaster, after giving one of his pupils a sound drubbing for speaking bad grammar, sent him to the other end of the room to inform another boy that he wished to speak to him, and, at the same time, promising to repeat the dose, if he spoke to him ungrammatically. The youngster, quite satisfied with what he had got, determined to be exact: and thus he addressed his fellow pupil:—"There is a common substantive, of the masculine gender, singular number, nominative case, and in an angry mood, that sits perched upon the eminence at the other end of the room, wishes to articulate a few sentences to you in the present tense."
>
> *West London Observer*, 9 December 1865

The *Chelsea News*, 22 December 1866, was very keen on puns. Note this is an exact transcription: they wanted to make sure their readers understood them.

CHRISTMAS PLUM PUDDING DIGESTERS.

> When was beef tea manufactured upon a large scale in England?—When Henry the Eighth dissolved the *Pope's Bull*.
>
> When does a man devour a musical instrument?—When he has a pianoforte (Piano for tea.)

Why are crows sensible birds?—Because they never complain without *caws*.

What kind of wine is both meat and drink?—Old port, with a crust.

Why should a man when he's eating salt fish on Good Friday take no egg sauce with it?—Because his appetite would be egg-sauce-ted (exhausted.)

Why is a soldier like the vine?—Because he is 'listed, trained, has ten-drills, and shoots.

Why is a thief in a garret like an honest man?—Because he is above doing a wrong action.

Why is a man searching for the philosopher's stone like Neptune?—Because he's a sea-king (seeking) what never was.

Why did the accession of Victoria throw a greater damper over England than the death of King William?—Because the King was missed (mist) while the Queen was raining (reigning.)

Why is a fender like Westminster Abbey?—Because it contains the ashes of the great (grate).

Why should a gouty man make his will?—That he might have his leg-at-ease (legatees.)

When may a gentleman's estates be said to consist of feathers?—When they are all entails (*Hen Tails*.)

Why is a young lady at work like another doing wrong?—Because she is *mis*(*s*) *employed*.

When is a sick man like a leg of pork?—When he is cured.

Why is your nose like T in abilities?—Because it is between two eyes.

Why are clothes hung out on a line a railway train?—Because they are on the "line."

When is a man like something borrowed?—When he's alone (a loan.)

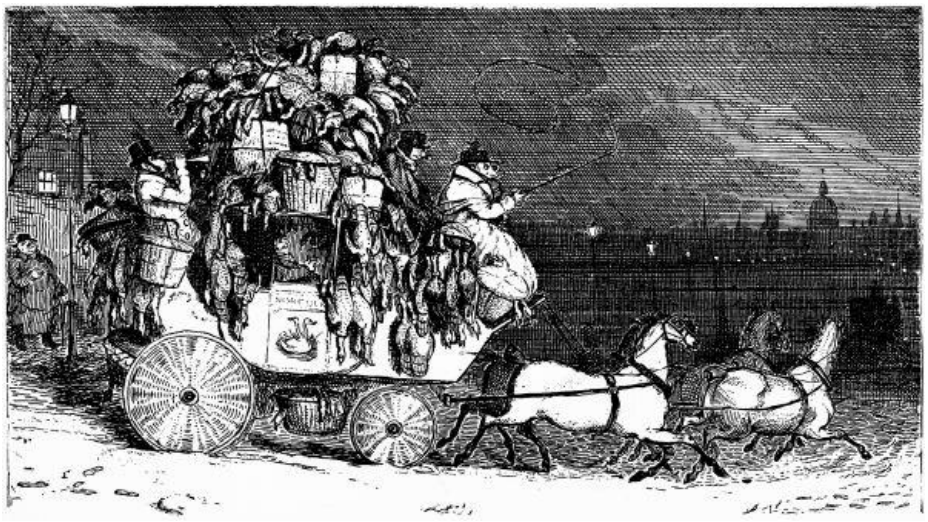
When is a piece of roast beef like a good action?—When it is well done.

If a tree shaken by the wind happens to smash a pane of glass, what might it say to the tree?—Tree-mend-us.

When does a good natured man resemble a soldier?—When he stands *a-tease*.

Why does an aching tooth impose silence upon the sufferer?—Because it makes him *hold his jaw*.

And lastly, from *The Book of Christmas* at Project Gutenberg. In Borrow's time and our own Norfolk is known for it's contribution to Christmas. In the days of the stage coach, a man went into the office and asked the fare to London. He received the reply, "turkeys".



Christmas at the Fulham Union, 1863

Each year, the Brompton local newspapers published a somewhat flowery account of Christmas in the workhouses. This one is from Christmas 1863, and is for Fulham workhouse, about a mile from the Borrows.

> As Christmas-Day for the current year fell so near the end of the week, we were unable to furnish our readers on Saturday last with so circumstantial a report as usual respecting the manner in which this great Holiday was celebrated in the Fulham Union. Frequently as it has entered within our special province as public chroniclers to describe the Festival we never proceeded to discharge this duty with greater pleasure.
>
> In the first place, it is agreeable to our feelings when we can truthfully assure the Rate-payers that the unfortunate recipients of their bounty are under the supervision of zealous officers who spare no efforts to make them participate in the festive enjoyments of the season.
>
> In the second place, our Union has established for itself no mean character for the skill hitherto displayed in the decoration of the Dining Hall, and the labour necessarily entailed in securing this end was never crowned with success more complete than on the present occasion. The result thus obtained reflects the more credit on those who achieved it (as we intimated last week), that almost at the eleventh hour the Master found he would be unable to avail himself of the services whereon he had been accustomed to rely. Accordingly the conception of the general design no less than the working out of its individual parts devolved solely upon those among the inmates who possessed the requisite knowledge.

So late as the proceeding Monday, at breakfast time, the Hall presented merely its ordinary appearance, but no sooner was the morning meal dispatched than preparations were diligently set on foot and persevered in unweariedly till Christmas Eve. Then the apartment appeared festooned on every side with wreaths of evergreens depending gracefully from the ceiling, surrounding the central pillars, and drooping from the cornices, a contrast with the predominating colour being secured by the skilful interspersion of artificial roses among the leaves. The larger wall panels were filled in with intricate designs framed of single leaves, which also were varied by flowers placed in a regular series, while the smaller panels held handsome boughs, which seemed to spring each from a cornucopia, an effect produced by a very artistic adaptation of fancy paper. And we were specially delighted with quite a novel feature in the arrangements, viz., the introduction of several cases of birds from the Male Idiots' Ward. Their merry little tenants, placed at proper distances, among the foliage, appeared to be hopping about in a natural thicket, while their bright yellow or parti-coloured jackets conveyed the idea of juvenile guests arrayed like all the others in their holiday clothes. Moreover, their natural animation imparted quite a lively tone to the general effect of the decorations, for so far from manifesting any dread of the noise inseparable from such a gathering, the pretty creatures appeared quite at home amid the hum of pleasant talk. Indeed, when the school boys gave the usual British cheer as a finale to the proceedings, some of the yellow-jackets burst into song, as though suddenly inspired with an eager wish to swell the chorus of universal satisfaction. An excellent sermon was preached by the new chaplain, the Rev. William Norval, which was listened to with the greatest attention by Mr. Blachford and the inmates. The dinner comprised the invariable constituents of Old English fare on Christmas Day, the admirable plan recently inaugurated here being again adopted, viz., sending a single joint to every ward, so that the entire body of the inmates were thus subdivided into so many dinner messes, where each enjoyed the comfort and satisfaction of forming a member of a snug Christmas party. The quality of the viands was unexceptionable, as usual at Fulham Union, and of course, those time honoured indulgences were not forgotten—Snuff and tobacco for the aged adults, with sweetmeats for the children. An abundant reinforcement to this part of the day's entertainment was provided by the thoughtful generosity of J. C. Swail, Esq., as on similar occasions, this gentleman forwarded hampers of nuts and apples for the children and imbecile inmates, and oranges for the sick, together with a handsome present of wine for the officers' table. In fine, from all we have heard and from all we have seen, we really believe that the officers of no similar institution can more justly claim credit than those of the Fulham Union for the exertions made and the very satisfactory result secured thereby to all concerned. The worthy Chairman was present as usual, and (also as usual) addressed the inmates with that cordial sympathy which justly renders him so great a favourite among them. He was ably seconded by the medical officer, Dr. Spaull, evidently entering heart and soul into the day's proceeding. Mr. Churchwarden Smith and Mr. Bernard also rendered the graceful condescension of their presence, and Mr. Stanham, with other gentlemen and friends of the establishment were also present.

West London Observer, 2 January 1864.

Similar scenes took place in Kensington workhouse, also near the Borrows, although Kensington's was a very grand affair, having been built in 1846:

[The image is from the excellent *Time Machine* blog of Kensington and Chelsea archives: https://rbkclocalstudies.wordpress.com]

Some notes by Peter Asher

Our member, Peter Asher, who sadly passed away this year, noted this curious little snippet in the *Wrexham Leader* of 1871.

> For some weeks back a gypsy looking "cove" who rejoices in the sobriquet of "Bill Florence", has been lording it over some of the working class in the town, and having a tolerable portion of Irish blood running in his veins, has been seen to indulge occasionally in that favourite freak that is said to be extensively indulged in "Donnybrook Fair", accompanied by the ejaculation "Who'll tread on the tails of my coat?"
>
> This kind of bragadosia appeared to have cowed some of the natives, who rather pride themselves as being well up in "the manly art", and it became a sort of pet pastime with the gypsy to go from one spirit vault to another seeking whom he might devour, and at last he seemed to have found a foeman worthy of the prowess in "Charley the Well."

A meeting was arranged for Tuesday and Brynycabbannau was selected as the battleground, where "Charley the Well" agreed to a stand up fight for the "HONOUR OF WREXHAM" against this interloper whose hand appeared to be against every man. This little affair soon became known in a "select circle" and on Tuesday morning a crowd was seen following the antagonists up Edgeworth Lane.

On reaching the first field, the gypsy eager for the fray threw his cap over the hedge, and Charley, nothing undaunted threw his after it. "Bill Coal" was bottle holder for Charley and the gypsy's brother performed the like office for him.

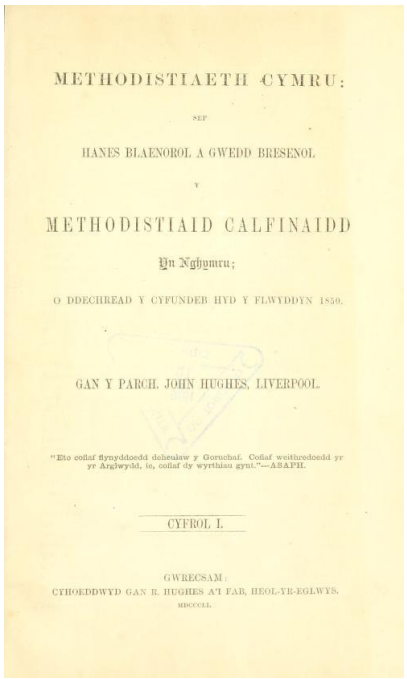
We have received a "lengthened report" of the fight, done in such graphic detail, that it is hardly suited to our columns. We content ourselves by saying "Charley" gave the gypsy a sound thrashing and won the belt as champion of Wrexham.

Readers of *Wild Wales* may remember that the carrier Borrow met on the way to Wrexham (1854), had also succeeded in the "manly art" at Wrexham:

"I suppose," said I, "there are few Welshmen such big fellows as yourself."

"No, Measter," said the fellow, with a grin, "there are few Welshmen so big as I, or yourself either; they are small men mostly, Measter, them Welshers, very small men—and yet the fellows can use their hands. I am a bit of a fighter, Measter, at least I was before my wife made me join the Methodist connection, and I once fit with a Welshman at Wrexham, he came from the hills, and was a real Welshman, and shorter than myself by a whole head and shoulder, but he stood up against me, and gave me more than play for my money, till I gripped him, flung him down and myself upon him, and then of course t'was all over with him."

Again from Peter:


METHODISTIAETH CYMRU:

SEF

HANES BLAENOROL A GWEDD BRESENOL

Y

METHODISTIAID CALFINAIDD

Yn Nghymru;

O DDECHREAD Y CYFUNDEB HYD Y FLWYDDYN 1850.

GAN Y PARCH. JOHN HUGHES, LIVERPOOL.

"Eto cofiaf flynyddoedd deheuaw y Goruchaf. Cofiaf weithredoedd yr yr Arglwydd, ie, cofiaf dy wyrthiau gynt."—ASAPH.

CYFROL I.

GWREXSAM:
CYHOEDDWYD GAN R. HUGHES A'I FAB, HEOL-YR-EGLWYS.
MDCCCL.

This is a scan of the front page of *Methodistiaeth Cymru*, or the *History of Welsh Methodism*. It is the book which George used as an excuse for his walk across Ruabon Mountain to Wrexham in 1854. It was published by Hughes & Son, a very well known publisher of Welsh literature. The advert which George saw would have been in the *Wrexham Advertiser*. [1] The book was written by John Hughes (who was a brother of the owner of Hughes & Son) and was published in three volumes. The one George bought was volume two. I am lucky enough to have all three volumes but unfortunately I don't understand a word of it as my Welsh does not extend to the level of these books.

For those who read Welsh there's an article about the book and John Hughes at:

https://cy.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodistiaeth_Cymru_(John_Hughes)

and from that article we have a portrait of the man himself:

Footnote.

[1] The *Wrexham Advertiser* was an English weekly newspaper and is now available on-line (British Library Newspapers). The issues for 14 and 21 October don't mention the book, but there was an advert for W. Bayley's cheap books which were mainly religious works.

Borrow's Christmas, 1815

In 1815 George Borrow, then twelve years old, was in Ireland where his father's regiment had been sent. Borrow traced his remarkable interest in languages to the Christmas of 1815. *Lavengro* chapter 11:

"Do you play much at cards?"

"Sorra a game, Shorsha, have I played with the cards since my uncle Phelim, the thief, stole away the ould pack, when he went to settle in the county Waterford!"

"But you have other things to do?"

"Sorra anything else has Murtagh to do that he cares about; and that makes me dread so going home at nights."

"I should like to know all about you; where do you live, joy?"

"Faith, then, ye shall know all about me, and where I live. It is at a place called the Wilderness that I live, and they call it so, because it is a fearful wild place, without any house near it but my father's own; and that's where I live when at home."

"And your father is a farmer, I suppose?"

"You may say that; and it is a farmer I should have been, like my brother Denis, had not my uncle Phelim, the thief! tould my father to send me to school, to learn Greek letters, that I might be made a saggart of and sent to Paris and Salamanca."

...

"And what has this to do with playing cards?"

"Little enough, Shorsha dear!—If there were card-playing, I should not be frighted."

"And why do you not play at cards?"

"Did I not tell you that the thief, my uncle Phelim, stole away the pack? If we had the pack, my brother Denis and the gasoons would be ready enough to get up from their sleep before the fire, and play cards with me for ha'pence, or eggs, or nothing at all; but the pack is gone—bad luck to the thief who took it!"

"And why don't you buy another?"

"Is it of buying you are speaking? And where am I to get the money?"

"Ah! that's another thing!"

"Faith it is, honey!—And now the Christmas holidays is coming, when I shall be at home by day as well as night, and then what am I to do? Since I have been a

saggarting, I have been good for nothing at all—neither for work nor Greek—only to play cards! Faith, it's going mad I will be!"

"I say, Murtagh!"

"Yes, Shorsha dear!"

"I have a pack of cards."

"You don't say so, Shorsha mavourneen! you don't say that you have cards fifty-two?"

"I do, though; and they are quite new—never been once used."

"And you'll be lending them to me, I warrant?"

"Don't think it! But I'll sell them to you, joy, if you like."

"*Hanam mon Dioul*! am I not after telling you that I have no money at all?"

"But you have as good as money, to me, at least; and I'll take it in exchange."

"What's that, Shorsha dear?"

"Irish!"

"Irish?"

"Yes, you speak Irish; I heard you talking it the other day to the cripple. You shall teach me Irish."

"And is it a language-master you'd be making of me?"

"To be sure!—what better can you do?—it would help you to pass your time at school. You can't learn Greek, so you must teach Irish!"

Before Christmas, Murtagh was playing at cards with his brother Denis, and I could speak a considerable quantity of broken Irish.

The Christmas Story

Whilst George Borrow was in Badajoz, Portugal, in January 1836, he began work on translating the Gospel of St. Luke into the Romany dialect of the Spanish Gypsies, known as Caló. The end result, published January 1838, was *Embéo E Majaró Lucas*, commonly known as the *Gypsy Luke*. Below is Borrow's translation of the Christmas story. Whilst few will be able to understand what Borrow wrote, you could use an English Bible to see what the verses mean: it's Luke chapter two, starting at verse one.

JERÓ II.

1. André ocolas chibeses anacó, que chaló abrí yeque edicto de Cæsar Augusto, somia que sari a sueti sinara jinada.

2. Ocola brotoboro jinamiento sinaba querdi por Cyrino, Chino-baro de Syria.

3. Y chalaban os sares á libanarse os naos cata yeque á desquero foros.

4. Y ardiñó tambien Joseph del foros de Nazareth, á Judea, al foros de David, sos se heta Bethlehém: presas sinaba del quer y de la rati de David,

5. Somia libanarse o nao sat desqueri romi Maria, sos sinaba cambri.

6. Y sinando oté, anacó, que se pereléron os chibeses andré que terelaba de chindar.

7. Y minchabó a desquero Chaboro broto-chindado, y lo chibó andré diclés, y lo chitó andré yeque olibar: presas na sinaba lugar por junos andré a mesuna.

8. Y sinaba yeques durotunes andré ocola comarca, sos sinaban velando, y nacando as ocanas e rachí opré desquerias brajias.

9. Y he acoi se childó sunparal á junos yeque Manfariel e Erañoró, y a dut de Debél os cercó de yacque, y tereléron baro dal.

10. Y les penó o Manfariel: nacangueleis: {p:15}presas he acoi anuncio á sangue gosuncho baro, sos sinará á sari a sueti.

11. Que sejonia sinela chindado a sangue o Salvador, sos sinela o Christo Erañó, andré o foros de David.

12. Y ocona sinará á sangue o simache: Alachareis o Chaboro chibado andré dicles; y chitado andré yeque olibar.

13. Y yescotria se mecó dicar sat o Manfariel butrés manuces es jundunares e Tarpe, sos majarificaban a Debél, y penaban:

14. Chimusolano á Debél andré o Tárpe, y andré a phu paz á os sares de lachi suncái.

15. Y anacó, que yescotria que os Manfarieles chaléron de junos al Tarpe, os durotunés penaban os yeques a os averes: Chalemos disde Bethlehém, y diquelemos ma ha anacado, ma o Erañó, ha diado á amangue.

16. Y chaléron singó, y alacháron á Maria, y á Joseph, y al chaboro chitado andré o olibar.

17. Y pur ocono dicáron, jabilláron ma se les habia penado acerca de ocola Chaboró.

18. Y os sares sos lo juneláron, se zibáron: y tambien de ma os durotunés les habian penado.

19. Tami Maria aracateaba sarias ocolas buchias, estongerandolas andré desquero carló.

20. Y se limbidiáron os durotunés chimusolanificando y majarificando á Debél por sarias as buchias, ma habian junelado y dicado, andiar sasta les habia sinado penado.

Borrow's Christmas, 1836

In the winter of 1836 Borrow was in Spain as the agent of the Bible Society. In the letter below, we see how Borrow's Christmas of 1836 was spent. (From *Letters of George Borrow to the British and Foreign Bible Society* edited by T. H. Darlow.)

To the Rev. A. Brandram

(*Endorsed*: recd. Jany. 6, 1837)
MADRID, *December* 26*th*, 1836.

REVD. AND DEAR SIR,—I am just arrived at Madrid in safety. It has pleased the Lord to protect me through the perils of a most dismal journey. I reached Cordova in three days, attended by the old Italian whom I mentioned in my last letter, for I could procure no other guide. From Cordova I have ridden to Madrid in the company of a *contrabandista*, or smuggler, whose horses I insured, and to whom I am to give a gratuity of 42 dollars. We passed through the horrible pass of Despena Perros in the Sierra Morena. Providence here manifested itself; the day before, the banditti of the pass committed a dreadful robbery and murder by which they sacked 40,000 *reals*; they were probably content with their booty and did not interrupt me and my guide. We entered La Mancha, where I expected to fall into the hands of Palillos and Orejita. Providence again showed itself. It had been delicious weather; suddenly the Lord breathed forth a frozen blast, the severity of which was almost intolerable; no human being but ourselves ventured forth; we traversed snow-covered plains and passed through villages and towns without seeing an individual; the robbers kept close in their caves and hovels, but the cold nearly killed me. We reached Aranjuez late on Christmas day, and I got into the house of an Englishman, where I swallowed nearly two bottles of brandy; it affected me no more than warm water. I am now at my journey's end, and shall presently fall to work, for I must lose no time, but profit by the present opportunity. All is quiet in Madrid and in the neighbourhood; Gomez has returned to Biscay. If my letter be somewhat incoherent, mind it not. I have just alighted, and the cold has still the mastery of me; I shall send a journal in a few days which will be more circumstantial. Write to my mother and say I am in safety. I shall write myself to-morrow, I can no more now.

GEORGE BORROW.

The Norfolk Militia in the Press

Mike Skillman has found the following mentions of the West Norfolk Militia (Borrow's father's regiment) in the *Norfolk Chronicle*. Firstly the regiment returning from their stay at Edinburgh: George Borrow, aged 11, would have been with them:

> July 13th 1814
>
> The first division of West Norfolk Militia, under the command of Col. Nelthorpe, marched into Norwich, from Yarmouth, where they had landed the previous morning from the Tickler cutter, and four Berwick traders from Leith. St. Peter's bells were rung, and the men received the hearty congratulations of the citizens. The second division arrived on the 16th, commanded by Major Barnham. On the 18th the Earl of Orford, colonel of the regiment, entertained the officers and their friends at the Maid's Head Inn. The regiment on the 19th received the thanks of the House of Commons for their services.

The Militia was raised again in 1815 as part of mobilising against Napoleon, who had escaped from Elba:

> April 22nd 1815
>
> The staff of the West Norfolk Militia, stationed in Norwich, received orders to raise men by beat of drum instead of by ballot. Recruiting parties were sent out for that purpose. It was announced on May 13th that these parties, under the direction of Capt. Borrow, had been very successful in obtaining men.

Capt. Borrow is of course Captain Thomas Borrow, George's father. The Militia were then sent to Ireland, freeing up the regular troops to fight Napoleon. The regiment and the Borrows departed in August:

> August 15th 1815
>
> The first division of the West Norfolk Militia marched from Norwich for Ipswich under command of Major Barnham; the second division, under Lieut.-Col. Nelthorpe, marched on the 16th, and the remainder on the 17th. The strength of the regiment was upwards of 500 rank and file, chiefly raised in three months by beat of drum. The corps embarked at Harwich, and sailed for Ireland on August 28th.

Borrow's insider view is recorded in Chapter 9 of *Lavengro*:

> In the autumn of the year 1815 we set sail from a port in Essex; we were some eight hundred strong, and were embarked in two ships, very large, but old and crazy; a storm overtook us when off Beachy Head, in which we had nearly foundered. I was awakened early in the morning by the howling of the wind, and the uproar on deck. I kept myself close, however, as is still my constant practice on similar occasions, and waited the result with that apathy and indifference which violent sea-sickness is sure

to produce. We shipped several seas, and once the vessel missing stays—which, to do it justice, it generally did at every third or fourth tack—we escaped almost by a miracle from being dashed upon the foreland. On the eighth day of our voyage we were in sight of Ireland.

Borrow's Christmas, 1853

R. A. J. Walling's book, George Borrow: the Man and his Work, published in 1908, is not only a good biography of Borrow (leaning heavily upon Knapp), but Walling investigated the Cornish links of Borrow. Below is Walling's account of Borrow's 1853 Christmas:

BORROW'S only journey to the land of mystery and legend from which his family sprang was made in 1853. It came about curiously. An incident occurred, soon after he had taken up his residence in lodgings at Yarmouth, which demonstrated both his personal courage and the easy terms on which he always was with the water. {f:146} In the midst of a terrible storm he dashed into the sea, himself saved one life from an overturned boat, and assisted to rescue the rest of the people in danger. He became the local hero of the hour, and an account of his gallantry was printed in the *Bury Post*.

The Borrows of Cornwall had been mainly a home-keeping race. The connection of George's branch with the parent stem had been completely severed half a century before, and the inhabitants of the Caradon Hills had altogether lost sight of old {p:147}Tom Borrow and his life. Now, however, the *Plymouth Mail* reprinted from the Bury paper a paragraph about the Yarmouth affair, and in process of time it was read at St. Cleer. The appearance of a person by the name of Borrow in this heroic shape was discussed with curiosity. Putting two and two together, the Cornishmen came to the conclusion that this celebrated author and saviour of drowning men could be none other than the son of that Tom Borrow whose claim to fame among them was that he had knocked down the headborough at Menheniot Fair.

Many of the name were in the district. Henry Borrow, of Looe Down, was a son of another Henry, George's uncle, and therefore a cousin of the Romany Rye. Henry had a daughter, Ann, married to Mr. Robert Taylor, of Penquite, a person of some consideration in the locality. The upshot of the discussion was that Mr. Taylor was requisitioned by the rest of the family to invite the celebrity to Cornwall. In a letter of acceptance, Borrow expressed the pleasure it gave him to receive such an invitation, and the delight he felt in knowing that there were still some who remembered his honoured father, who, he said, had as true a Cornish heart as ever beat.

...

He left Yarmouth on December 23rd, and, this time not disdaining the services of the detested railway, was able to reach Plymouth at midnight. In that day Plymouth was the western terminus of the railway system. Brunel's great bridge, which carries the iron road at a dizzy altitude across the Tamar from Devonshire into Cornwall, was not

raised till six years later, and people who adventured into the land of giants and saints, pilchards and pasties, must complete their journey by coach. Having slept a night at the Royal Hotel in Plymouth, Borrow found that the Christmas traffic had crowded the coach, and he arrived at the Borrovian determination to walk to Liskeard, on the main road eighteen miles away, the nearest town to his objective among the hills. Leaving his luggage to be carried on by the mail, he "threw his cloak on his arm (a very old friend which had seen some thirty years' service, the constant companion of his travels"), and trudged off to Devonport, across the Tamar by the ferry, and along the enchanting sylvan highway to the town whose representative in Parliament was just then laying about the "Puseyites" in a fashion most agreeable to Borrow.

There was a little stir in the bookish circles of the old Cornish borough among whom Mr. Taylor had spread the news that Borrow was coming, and a small party assembled to meet him and lionise him. These were drawn up under the porch of Webb's Hotel as the huge figure strode into view. There was the ex-Mayor, Mr. Bernard Anstis. There was the Town Clerk, Mr. James Jago, a connection of the Borrows by marriage. There were his own relations. Happily, under these new auspices, he dropped his affectation of objection to be lionised, and took wine with his worshippers at the hotel in quite a conventional manner. Then, after tea with the Jago family, he and Taylor mounted horseback and rode off to Penquite, four miles away, to spend an old-style rural Christmas. "A hospitable reception, with a log on the fire" was Borrow's own word for it—a brief but hearty tribute to the effect it had upon him. On Christmas Day he walked from Penquite to St. Cleer Church, about which his notebooks mention that it lacked an organ (as it does to this day), but that there was a fiddler in the gallery. Returning over the noble expanse of St. Cleer Down, he was introduced to a family of relations by marriage—the Pollards—and in the afternoon walked to their residence at Woolston to have lively talk of travel with two sons who had been in Australia, and to discuss the prehistoric memorials of the district, which he describes as "Druid stones." All the Borrows have left St. Cleer, but the Pollards are in possession of Penquite.

More on the Author's story in *Lavengro*
By Mike Skillman

Firstly a note about when *Lavengro* was written:

Borrow began work on *Lavengro* in 1842 and had written most of it by the end of 1843 [1], but work was then interrupted by a tour of eastern Europe and by ill-health. In 1848 Murray advertised it as a forthcoming work to be called *Lavengro, an Autobiography*. However the version Borrow finally delivered had been made into a novel whose fictional episodes are mixed with Borrow's memories.

In Newsletter number three I argued that, in chapter 67, the story of the Norway hawks, was included in the life story of "the author" by Borrow because he knew about Colonel Wilson's

hawking club near his birthplace Dereham and that Borrow had cobbled together events familiar to him to make a story.

Since then I have noticed some more examples of this in the same chapter 67.

There is much evidence of Borrow having spent some time in the Shrewsbury area around the year 1825. When writing *Lavengro* he probably drew on memories of this period of his life to manufacture scenes and conversations to include. For example, while telling his life story the author says to George:—

> "My great-grandfather on the male side was a silk mercer, in Cheapside, who, when he died, left his son, who was his only child, a fortune of one hundred thousand pounds and a splendid business; the son, however, had no inclination for trade, the summit of his ambition was to be a country gentleman, to found a family, and to pass the remainder of his days in rural ease and dignity, and all this he managed to accomplish; he disposed of his business, purchased a beautiful and extensive estate for fourscore thousand pounds, built upon it the mansion to which I had the honour of welcoming you to-day, married the daughter of a neighbouring squire, who brought him a fortune of five thousand pounds, became a magistrate, and only wanted a son and heir to make him completely happy."

If you look at the history of the family Gosnell who lived in Rossall or Ross Hall just outside Shrewsbury, you will find that the family Gosnell formerly had an estate called Coomb in Shropshire but had supported Cromwell, so on the Restoration of Charles II to the throne their estate was confiscated.

One of the family with the remainder of his money went to London and commenced business as a Silk Mercer.

He had a son, Edward Gosnell, who commenced business as a Wine Merchant, and having made a fortune, went back to Shropshire and purchased a piece of land near Shrewsbury and built Rossall on it. [2]

The similarities are obvious.

In the same chapter the author talks of his grandfather's death:—

> "he died of apoplexy on the day that my father came of age"

He then talks of his father's death:—

> "ten months after his marriage his horse fell upon him, and so injured him, that he expired in a few days in great agony. My grandfather was, indeed, a fortunate man; when he died he was followed to the grave by the tears of the poor - my father was not."

By the time Borrow was in the Shrewsbury area, the same Rossall or Ross Hall was owned by Cecil Forester M.P. It was visited in 1806 by the future George IV and his brother the future William the IV. When Cecil Forester came of age in 1828 the day was marred by the death of his father after falling from a horse.

Maybe I am putting two and two together and making five here. What do you think?

It seems that Borrow had a connection with Rossall. Maybe he went there with Cecil Forester and learnt some of the history of the house. Who knows?

Footnotes.

[1] "The author begs leave to state that Lavengro was planned in the year 1842, and all the characters sketched before the conclusion of the year 1843." *Lavengro* advertisement of 1851, included in John Murray edition.

[2] See https://www.parksandgardens.org/places/rossall

Carol Singing

Here's another article from the *West London Observer*, where a Gypsy boy was charged with carol singing, 12 December 1863. Mr. Dayman is the magistrate, and it all took place near the Borrows.

THURSDAY.

Christmas Carols—A boy named Weston Lee, who appeared to belong to the gypsy tribe, was charged before Mr. Dayman as follows:—

Police-Constable McQueen said that on the previous evening he was on duty in the York Road, Fulham, when he saw the prisoner and two other boys loitering about. The prisoner opened a gate and went down an area, and sang a Christmas carol. He went into another and came out without singing. He went down several areas, and in some of them he sang. Witness asked him what he had been doing down the areas, to which he made no answer, but ran away.

The prisoner said he sang outside the windows at every area he entered. If there had been any bells he should have rang them.

Mr. Dayman told him that he had no business to go down areas. He must sing outside. It was the way that persons went down areas for no good purpose. As it did not appear that the prisoner went down the areas for an unlawful purpose, he should discharge him.

The prisoner was then discharged.

Puzzles

Borrow usually is very clear when he writes, but occasionally uses words we don't recognise etc. What's Borrow getting at in the following? Answers after the word square...

1. ... but likewise with Snap, and with whiffler, quart pot, and frying pan, Billy Blind, and Owlenglass ...

2. MY grandfather was a shorter, and my father was a smasher; the one was scragg'd, and the other lagg'd.

3. ... commercial travellers in my time were divided into two classes, those who ate dinners and drank their bottle of port, and those who "boxed Harry."

If you enjoy word squares did you know you can get computers to create them for you? Below is one with words associated with George Borrow. The words can go backwards and diagonally. No prizes of course.

A S W J M R O J X D N H E A W
Z K E F P E T U L E N G R O N
V J R S H O H V L T L T D B P
R N T C S Z Z F I A U B A L M
O A R A A S Z T L R X R V A U
M I A N P L X W A B M P I V M
A V G D E A J P C E H S D E Y
N O G I N I W E N L A C L N L
Y R A N G R H I I E R X S G I
B R H A R T A G Z C D F I R W
I O W V O N V L D X R G C O G
B B T I Z F K H J C Y Z N U S
L P J A S A L A M A N C A I P
E H Q E U J E G R O E G R L M
W O R R O B J U S I L E F R O

And to help you out, the words are:

Borrovian	George	Borrow
Lavengro	Romany	Zincali
Petulengro	Bible	Scandinavia
Gwilym	Celebrated	Trials
David	Haggart	Sapengro
Armenian	Francis	Ardry
Salamanca		

And now the notes on Borrow's unusual phases.

" ... but likewise with Snap, and with whiffler, quart pot, and frying pan, Billy Blind, and Owlenglass ... " William Knapp has a footnote on this one:

Whiffler: An official character of the old Norwich Corporation, strangely uniformed and accoutred, who headed the annual procession on Guildhall day, flourishing a sword in a marvellous manner. All this was abolished on the passage of the Municipal

Reform Act in 1835. As a consequence, says a contemporaneous writer, "the Aldermen left off wearing their scarlet gowns, *Snap* was laid up on a shelf in the 'Sword Room' in the Guildhall, and the *Whifflers* no longer danced at the head of the procession in their picturesque costume. It was a pretty sight, and their skill in flourishing their short swords was marvellous to behold." See *Romany Rye*, pp. 349-50. [This from *Lavengro* ed. by William Knapp.]

Billy Blind and Owlenglass (Till Eulenspiegel).

———————————

"My grandfather was a shorter, and my father was a smasher; the one was scragg'd, and the other lagg'd."

See *Romany Rye*, chapter 41.

———————————

commercial travellers in my time were divided into two classes, those who ate dinners and drank their bottle of port, and those who "boxed Harry."

See *Wild Wales*, chapter 33.