

*Western Gazette Sept 1936*

**“THE SQUIRE” OF BUTLEIGH PASSES  
GREAT LOSS TO THE COUNTY  
THE PARISH’S DEEP LAMENT**

Somerset County is to-day the poorer for the loss of one of the most virile brains and devoted workers for the common cause of the area, and of far wider interests, that it has ever produced, one fitted to rank with the men of the highest distinction in its history, and one who will be mourned far and wide. Robert Neville Grenville passed to a well earned rest at noon on Sunday last, full of years and of honour amongst all who knew him. He had lived and worked far beyond the accustomed span of life, having entered upon his ninetieth year. As a lad he showed signs of the genius which placed him high in the world of engineering and research, and to him educational developments of much importance in modern life are due. Brusque to a degree, with a pungent humour and incisive wit which aimed at anyone with whom he came into intimacy, he possessed a talent for making friends of those whom he encountered in all spheres of life. His harmless fun was as much appreciated by those whom he made its object, and they were many, as by those who heard the stories of his playfulness. That is the word which best describes his sallies, and scores would tell with delight of the manner in which he had jested at their expense. Everybody knew that it was in kindly mood that he gave vent to his spirit of humour, and he ever retained their affection. Especially in the field of politics was this the case. He was boldly outspoken as to his opinions, and hit shrewdly at opponents, but there was never the slightest trace of maliciousness. He enjoyed a smart repartee at his own expense, and liked those who hit back at him when he scored against them on any point. In his public work it was rare indeed to find his equal in keen insight and knowledge of the best manner of carrying out works for the benefit of the public. He had a really marvellous grasp of detail, and one of the most retentive memories it would be possible to find. Moreover he was from his earliest years a close student and investigator, with a quick grasp of any subject in which he was interested - and they were very many indeed. His independence of thought and far vision were assets to the work and life of the county. He gained and filled with the greatest credit leading positions in many spheres. His worth and work were acknowledged from his University career onward to his latest engagements in public service.

**SOMERSET DRAINAGE LEADER.**

There was one particular sphere in which he was facile princeps, and in this he followed in the footsteps of his father, from whom he inherited more than an ordinary share of special ability. We refer to his very important work over the large section of Somerset which is land reclaimed from the sea, and maintained by the closest attention to the drainage system which made and keeps it available for use. To his father the late Mr. Ralph Neville Grenville and his colleague, Mr. Warry of Shapwick, was due the inception of the Somerset Drainage Act which has in these latter years furnished a model for a general Act for the whole kingdom.

In carrying out the provisions of that Act. and the application of it to a third of the County and the area of seven rivers was early entrusted to Mr. Robert Neville Grenville as chairman of the Drainage Board for the County, and the Somerset Drainage Commissioners of which he was the first to fill the office when it was within the last few years brought into existence to supersede the former rather more disunited organisation. His intimate and minute knowledge of every smallest detail of the system of drainage was of supreme value to the Commissioners and to their various officers from time to time. It would be quite wrong to say that he had any special interest in any portion of this work, but his closer association with the Upper Brue Area marked him out locally for the value of his knowledge and experience of the district closest to his home. From the earliest days of its existence under the special Act of

Parliament, just upon sixty years ago he had been the chairman of the Upper Brue Board, and even when his health prevented his personal attendance at the meetings he dealt at his home with any special point that arose, and through the officers or his vice-chairman his views were conveyed to the Board meetings, and invariably were endorsed by the members. Any suggestion of his that he should be superseded as chairman was strenuously negated by the Board. This was only one amongst the many phases of his public life though it was the most specialised form of his service.

#### MAGISTERIAL AND COUNTY WORK.

From the old days when the controls of so many county affairs were in the hands of the magistrates sitting at Quarter Sessions, Mr. Robert Neville Grenville was amongst the leading men in the work of the county. When the County Councils were established he was one of those selected for the primary occupants of the Aldermanic Bench, an office he filled with distinction for very many years. Not that he approved of County Councils - he was strongly opposed to them. When asked why with his views he went on the Council at all he retorted: "To keep a worse blackguard off it."

He was one of the senior magistrates of the county, having been appointed at the Michaelmas Charter Session 1870, 66 years ago. He sat on the Glastonbury Bench, of which he was for a great many years the chairman. His shrewd intellect made him a highly valued occupant of the position. His sense of justice was a very high one, and his knowledge of the work and of the law enabled him to fulfill his duties there in a manner beyond criticism. On occasion he could severely castigate an offender, his comments frequently being in such instances a greater punishment than the sentence imposed. He was a great stickler for precision in the proceedings before the Courts, as well as in other directions, but he knew, too, how and when to exercise the quality of mercy and show kindly consideration and give valuable advice.

Besides being a justice of the peace he was a Deputy Lieutenant for the county, for which office he qualified by his service for fourteen years in the West Somerset Yeomanry Cavalry, from which he retired in 1884 with the rank of Captain. In the year 1900-1 he was High Sheriff of Somerset, being the last of the Victorian sheriffs.

#### AGRICULTURE BENEFITS.

Mr. Neville Grenville was for a great number of years on the Councils of the Bath and West and Southern Counties Agricultural Association of the Royal Agricultural Society, the British Dairy Farmers' Association and the Somerset County Agricultural Association. With his customary avidity for the practical side of anything in which his interest was aroused he made a speciality of research and instruction phases of the Societies' work. He did very much in this way both with the greater Associations and in the county. His mechanical bent led him to take keen interest in new farm appliances and in this particular sphere he was himself an inventor. Not always was this .....

#### ORIGINATOR OF NATIONAL FRUIT AND CIDER INSTITUTE.

A subject to which he devoted much study for many years, and in which he carried out valuable experiments, was the improvement of the county beverage - cider. In this he had an able assistant in " Faithful Frank " Talbot, whose tragic death lent an added solemnity to a mournful occasion of three weeks ago at Butleigh - the funeral of the Squire's wife. The fame of the Butleigh researches spread far and wide, and amongst other recognitions received by the Squire was a gold medal from France. The great result of his pioneer work in this direction was the establishing by the Government of the National Fruit and Cider Institute at Long Ashton, near Bristol, under Professor Barker, to continue and develop research work on more elaborate and extensive lines than could be expected of a private investigator. The testing of different varieties of fruit and soil for the production of cider, the elimination of wild - yeasts and of various contaminating troubles, the proper blending of fruit and of its

produce, and the many other phases of cider and perry production and of other products of the fruits in a well equipped laboratory were but a portion of the Institute's work. Attention was given to growth of the fruit itself, j both for culinary and table purposes, the dealing with orchard pests, and the improvement of every process connected with orchard and other fruit culture. This was a result of the Squire's initiative, and was followed up by him with the chief and staff.

Incidentally we may mention his endeavours to deal with the tenant land problem.

#### ANOTHER PUBLIC SERVICE

As he was one of the first - of course he would be - to run a motor car in its primitive stages, a steam driven car, so he was one of the earliest of the road chiefs as a member of the County Authority, to recognise the value of the steam roller in road construction, forming a rapidly consolidated surface instead of the metal lying loose till passing traffic had made it settle in place. His influence made Somerset highway authorities one of the first to employ the new method. and Butleigh Court demesne " stabled " one of the first rollers to be used on the public roads. Mr. Neville Grenville was also the Originator of the now familiar black and white posts for road traffic signs.

In his later years another innovation which he was instrumental in introducing into public service in Somerset was the dredger for the drainage system, which effected great improvements in the Upper Brue district as well as elsewhere.

#### PISCICULTURE,

From another angle - the angler's - there is a feature of the Squire to be viewed. A disciple of Isaac Walton himself, he was also a pisciculturist, and as a breeder of trout he was able on occasion to afford pleasure to his brethren of the rod by enriching the famous Blagdon Lake on Mendip with trout from his ponds, in both the common and rainbow varieties. How many one wonders, of those four or five pound beauties which we read of as taken at Blagdon spent their earliest days in the ponds on Butleigh Estate.

Mr. R. Neville Grenville was President of the Glaston Manor Angling Association which owed much to his active and interest in their sport.

Coursing, too, owes something to the Squire's interest, and he was one of the patrons of the Butleigh and Kingweston Coursing Club, which meets in the vicinity of and on the Squire's Estate and that of his neighbour Captain W. F. Dickinson.

#### FOR CHURCH AND STATE

It is almost superfluous to place on record in this notice that the Squire was a staunch upholder of Church and State. He was descended from, a famous churchman of his day, and like his predecessors supported the Established Church, and was ready to do all in his power for it, especially his parish church at Butleigh, of which he was the patron. He was also the patron at Baltonsborough. He was pre-eminently a Conservative and an outspoken one on all occasions. For many years he had been the President of the Conservative Association for the Division in which he resided, whatever the changes in its limits and title. He had in that position practically veto power when it became necessary to choose a candidate for the seat. In connection with political meetings marry engaging incidents will be recalled when he chose novel and intriguing methods of enforcing his arguments. One such in the Assembly Rooms at Glastonbury might be given as an instance. It was in the Free Trade versus Fair Trade contest, when he was in the chair at the meeting in question. He was arguing especially with reference to the effect of Free Trade on the local industry, and suddenly stood up on the chair and put his foot on the table in front of him, inviting inspection of the shoe he was wearing. He then put up the other foot, and challenged anyone to say what difference there was in them. None could be readily detected, but one had been made in England, he informed

the audience, the other imported duty free from America, and sold at a much lower price than the home made article. His arguments were invariably forcible and clever, as well as original. He had seen considerable service afloat, and another strong point with him was the proper flying of the Union Jack. If he had the opportunity when he saw it hoisted the wrong way up he would insist on its being altered. He was well pleased if he saw the flag run up navy fashion and broken, that is - sent up as a ball and opened out. He gave Butleigh Legionaires a taste of his quality over this not so long ago at one of their gatherings.

#### HIS EARLY DAYS.

To go back from the Neville Grenville whom we have so long known, to the " Bob Neville " of his youth. For he was in his father's lifetime known by the family name of Neville, assuming the name of Grenville in addition on succeeding to the Butleigh Estate on his father's death which was exactly fifty years ago on August 20! There are still some traditions of his liveliness, and of his independent spirit. He was sent first to Eton, and then, as with others of the family for many years before, to Cambridge University. The Braybrooks, to whom allusion will be made later, were hereditary visitors of Magdalene College at that University, and his grandfather, the Hon. and Very Rev. George Neville Grenville (a son of Lord Braybrook) was at one time head master of the College and Vicar of Hawarden, the home of the Rt, Hon. Wm. Ewart Gladstone. At Cambridge Mr. Bob Neville met a fellow student with the same bent as himself, and together they studied engineering. According to one story told, for which we cannot of course vouch, this pair set a poser for the dons. There was no instructor in the subject, and, so the story goes, they had to set their own examination papers - which is scarcely likely. However, Mr. Robert's name heads the list of first applied science degrees at the University. If the story is true no other students had the same privilege, for this modern subject, became a recognised course for study almost immediately. Mr. Robert Neville was apprenticed to Messrs. Easton, Amos and Anderson, engineers, of London, whilst his friend went on the staff of the G.W.R. at Swindon, where he was responsible for many important developments. Mr. Neville saw, whilst in his early years, terms of service ashore and afloat, and it has been stated to us —again we cannot verify it— that he drove the first train from London to Brighton. It is certain that if the chance had come his way to do anything of the sort he would have undertaken it.

#### HOBBY AND HOME CRAFT.'

Quite apart from his engineering shop where heavy practical work was carried on for so many years, the Squire brought his engineering hobby into his home, and amongst the stately surroundings was a recess, well lighted, where miniature instruments lay ready to hand, with model engines and other interesting studies. Amongst his latest models were those of dredgers as used in the Drainage area, one with a vertical and another with a horizontal engine.

#### AS SQUIRE.

When he succeeded to the Estate he became popular with the tenantry, who enjoyed his foibles as much as he did in flashing them, upon his associates or working them out, and many a droll story of him will live for generations probably. He earned their respect for his many sterling attributes, and no man. was more honoured amongst his own people. Unemployment was practically unknown at Butleigh, for if any resident of the village was out of work the Squire would find some job for him on the Estate if he was willing to take it.

#### THE TRIBUNAL AND TOR HILL

Attention has been recently directed to the ownership of Glastonbury Tor Hill, and its proposed purchase for the nation by public subscription, for which an appeal has been promoted. It is of course, known that some time ago Mr. Neville-Grenville made over to the National Trust the Abbot's Tribunal in the High Street. At the same time he offered the Tor

Hill to the Trust but it could not be then accepted. The Tor came to the Neville Grenville family through Sir Richard Colt Hoare of Stourhead, Wilts., the tower on which the estate is a conspicuous object from the Tor, or from Hester Lady Hoare, a near relative of Baron Glastonbury, the Neville Grenville, then the owner of Butleigh.

The towers on the Tor and at Stourhead formed admirable look-outs and means of communications by signals between the relatives in days when other means were slow and difficult. Both Lady Hester and Baron Glastonbury were descended from Sir Richard Temple of Stow, whose heir and successor in that generation was the eldest brother of Baron Glastonbury and of Lady Braybrook, his sister and successor at Butleigh. When the succession of Mr George Neville to the Temple estate took place it had become the Marquisate of Buckingham, Earldoms of Temple and Nugent (Irish peerage), and Barony of Cobham. The elder brother of Baron Glastonbury and Lady Braybrook was elevated to the Dukedom of Buckingham and Chandos and Marquisate of Chaudos. The Dukedom of Buckingham and Chandos is now extinct, and the Earldom of Temple, in which it merged, is now held by Lord Temple of Stow, of Newton St. Loe, near Bath and Bristol, the descendant of the Gore Langtons who were M.P.s for Somerset when the old Squire of Butlcigh. their cousin, represented this part of Somerset. Another brother of Lord Glastonbury and of Lady Braybrook was created Baron Grenville. Lady Braybrook was the Squires great grandmother.

#### THE LATE MRS. NEVILLE GRENVILLE.

It is only a month ago to-day that Mrs. Neville Grenville. wife of Squire Robert, and a granddaughter of a former Lord Portman. passed to her rest. After such a very brief interval the husband has followed the wife to whom, he was so devoted, a devotion reciprocated in the highest degree. He was too ill to attend her funeral at which occurred an unhappy incident that made it a memorable event. "Faithful Frank," who for so many years had been the Squire's right hand man in one of his special pursuits, had a fatal seizure at the graveside. Enfeebled as he had been for some months, the loss of his wife and of his old servitor, following closely upon that of his nephew and the heir to the estate of Butleigh, must have come as a severe shock to him. But he was not the man to allow others to perceive how great it was, and it was stated that he bore up wonderfully. Since then, however, he had rapidly declined, and his demise on Sunday at noon was fully anticipated.

#### AGRICULTURAL PROGRESS.

The old Squire from his earliest years in that position was keenly alive as landlord to the improvements which presented themselves in rapidity and ease in the cultivation of the land and the harvesting of crops. The Butleigh Estate thus became a pioneer centre for the use of modern developments. The earliest steam ploughs in the West of England were used here. When rapid methods were invented for the hay fields and corn fields they were introduced, and in various other ways Butleigh was in the van of progress.

#### WORK WITH THE BATH & WEST.

Capt. Storr, secretary of this Society, informs us that the late Mr. R. Neville Grenville became a member of the Bath & West & Southern Counties Society in 1869. when his predecessor. Mr. Ralph Neville Grenville, M.P., was a vice-president; and a member of the Council in 1872. He was at the date of his death the senior member of the Council. For many years he took an active part in the affairs of the , Society, being a member of several committees and a steward of the Implement section of the annual show's. His outstanding contribution to agriculture was the placing of cider making on a scientific basis. In 1892 he began a series of experiments on the system of cider making advocated by James Harper, and in the following year the Bath & West Society secured the co-operation of Mr. F. J. Lloyd to oversee the necessary analysis an microscopic work ..of experimental work reported in the Journals of the Society being of national importance, it became possible to enlist the support

of the Board of Agriculture with a view to placing the work on a permanent basis. In 1903 the Bath & West Society, the Board of Agriculture and six neighbouring counties combined to found the National Fruit and Cider Institution at Long Ashton, which to this day holds its annual meetings at the Society's shows. In 1895 Mr. Neville Grenville was elected a vice-president of the Society. Although towards the end of his life he had retired from active duties in the show yard, he never ceased to take the keenest interest in the affairs and fortunes of the Society.

#### ANCIENT AND ILLUSTRIOUS ANCESTRY

A claim that can be put forth by members of more than one family of Somerset, as by others in the West of England, is that they "came over with the Conqueror," William of Normandy, in or about 1066. One of these was the Squire of Butleigh as regards some of his ancestors; but he could go back still further if he wished to the times of the Saxon kings, and if heraldry be any authority to the Heptarchy. To follow back the various lines of his progenitors male and female is to take a flight over a great part of the field of English history, and be brought in contact with some of its most memorable events. Members of the family in direct line of ancestry and immediately collateral bear some of the most distinguished names in history. On the high seas, the battlefields on land, in the Senate and the diplomatic service they have, left an indelible mark. "Many a crest that is famous in story" has been borne by them; songs recalling their exploits have come down through many generations, and are still sung to-day; whilst traditions are long extant of their doings, one being some nine hundred years old and still the subject of pageantry in its locality and elsewhere. Such events as the campaign of the Great Duke of Marlborough in Flanders ("where the army swore terribly" according to the old record), the fighting with the Spanish Armada, and other famous battles found members of the families from which the old Squire was descended in high command.

#### A POLITICAL OPPONENT'S TRIBUTE.

Mr. Arthur Johnson, a leading political organiser for the West of England for the Liberal Party, writes:—

"There are few Victorians left now that the 'Squire' has gone to his rest, so life is the poorer in its variety and example. It was my duty on occasion to visit him regarding matters upon which we were not in common agreement, and many were the trenchant observations he made about the policy I represented and the people responsible for it, not always hostile, but a fearless examination of things as he saw them I learned to listen to him - which was a rare and valuable experience to one who had to try and understand mankind; but I always knew that were my request reasonable it would be granted, and my departure accompanied with some shrewd observation and twinkle of merriment. Truly he played a good part in that element of British life to which he belonged.

#### RURAL COUNCIL'S APPRECIATION

At the monthly meeting of the Wells Rural District Council "on Wednesday at Wells the presiding Chairman, Mr. John Welch, at the opening of the meeting, said that before proceeding with the business he wished to refer to the loss the district had sustained by the death of Mr. Robert Neville Grenville. He proposed that a vote of sympathy be sent to his relatives. Mr. Neville Grenville was at one time a member of the Sanitary Authority and had always been very helpful in the district and willing to promote the welfare of the parish in which he lived. He had carried out a tremendous lot of work for the County as an Alderman and in other ways, and a great deal for the Rural District. He proposed also that his Clerk record in the minutes the Council's appreciation of the services he had rendered to the County and district, and their regret at his death.

The propositions were carried, all present standing.

#### BUTLEIGH HOSPITAL.

A work to which our own district owes a very great deal to the Squire, and Shepton Mallet also shared, was the administration of the legacy of Sir George Bowles and the establishment of the Butleigh Hospital. From the legacy also Shepton Mallet Cottage Hospital received a substantial grant to supplement the efforts of Dr. S. Craddock, its founder, and enabled the new hospital building there to be of a more adequate character. From its start up till the close of his life the Squire maintained the keenest interest in Butleigh Hospital, splendidly aided by Mrs. Neville Grenville. They took care that as far as they were able the greatest efficiency should be maintained, and they aided very liberally the financial requirements of the establishment. The Squire was one of the foundation managers. With his customary foresight a few years ago, realising that he could not long continue his personal interest, he exercised his position in making a change to ensure the future prosperity of the Hospital, and extend its area of usefulness and appeal, by an enlargement and reconstitution of the Board of Governors. The Hospital, we may mention was first discussed in 1881, and it was opened on St. Luke's Day, Oct. 18th, 1883.

#### BUTLEIGH COURT.

The mansion which the Squire had occupied for half a century as owner - he was born at Windsor, we believe, if not at the Castle - is a structure of rather remarkable character in its arrangement and architecture externally. A special feature is the many chimneys of special character, of which it is commonly believed that no two are alike. This is true of the remarkable spiral and other ornamentation of each, which gives wonderful variety and beauty to the upper portion of the building, but in the case of a small plainer stack of three they correspond with each other. The work on the mansion and its building generally was carried out by the Glastonbury staff of the late Mr. Frederick Merrick, father of the late Alderman John Merrick.

#### A VILLAGE IN MOURNING.

Throughout the place on Sunday there were signs of mourning for the death of Mr. Neville Grenville, and these were intensified during the succeeding days. At the Court the Squire's own flag floated at half mast, and there were other indications of the fact that the esteemed owner for half a century was no more.

The coffin was being constructed in the Estate workshops of oak grown on the Estate and specially selected by the Squire himself a quarter of a century ago for the interment when their time came of himself and Mrs. Neville Grenville.

The body was taken to the church on Wednesday evening, when the customary short service was held; and on Thursday morning a Communion service was celebrated.

The funeral was arranged for yesterday (Thursday) afternoon at 2.30.

[Our photo is by Mr. Otridge, Butleigh - *see under Robert Neville-Grenville file* ]