

CHARACTERS OF WINSLOW

No. 1

Henry Arthur Jones - author
and
Silvanus Jones - farmer

By Norman A. Saving, 1979

Photographs of scenes
familiar to Silvanus Jones.

- (1) S. Jones's house at No. 3 Horn Street.
- (2) Sewerage works by Matthews Bro's 1903.
- (3) Site of The Booteries, pulled down by
W.R.D.C. 1903.
- (4) Winslow Fire Brigade and Engine House 1871.

1.2.3. Cllr. K. J. Reading, Swanbourne.

4. Courtesy of the Buckingham Advertiser.

It is said that when Silvanus first came to Winslow, he lived at No. 27 High Street a house which had been rebuilt on the site of the old 'Three Pigeons' destroyed by fire Aug. 14th, 1775.

CHARACTERS OF WINSLOW

A quite famous man who was born within the Manor of Winslow, and had association with Winslow for many years was Henry Arthur Jones (1851 - 1929), to whom the following lines are intended as a tribute, and a much needed local record - of him and also his father.

January the 7th 1979 was the 50th Anniversary of the death of H.A.Jones, dramatist, who was described in the last century as: The gifted author whom North Bucks will always be proud to remember as one of her sons, dramatist of English rural life, and a clever author who is never more graphic than when describing this, our picturesque and highly historical County. In almost all of his plays one or two of the principal personages are sure to be extracted from Bucks, for he has a habit of localising his characters.

He was born the eldest son of a tenant farmer, on 28th September 1851 at Granborough* his mother Elizabeth (nee Stevens) of East Claydon, and his father Silvanus Jones of Welsh descent. In 1871 Silvanus is down as owning 78a 3r 31p of land in Buckinghamshire, with a gross estimated rental of £158.10s. The family it was said to me recently, were very business-like people - and strong Dissenters.



* His father had taken Ley House Farm at this place in 1850, but the parish register fails to mention H.A.J.

Silvanus was an extensive grazier and cattle dealer, with farms in several parishes, a familiar personality possessed of a keen wit, and a widely read man who if he felt at all strongly upon a particular subject would grow eloquent and often break into rhyme; he had great knowledge of local history, and was most certainly well known for his 'characteristic' letters to the press and local Council.

His religious faith and belief is shown when he addressed the Opening Meeting of Winslow's new Congregational Church on Tuesday January 20th 1885 - when he spoke in what was described as 'his warm-hearted, earnest manner'. As non-conformists he said "they loved their principles, and were prepared to make sacrifices for them, and if anyone attempted to crush them they were like the aromatic herb so familiar to them all, the more you trod upon it, the greater was the odour it emitted".



During a run of Lord Rothschild's Hounds on Thursday 29th November 1888, he became quite famous for impounding what he referred to as his lucky Stag in a cow-house along the Aylesbury Road after it had taken refuge there. Indignant at finding the stag on his land, he took possession of it, placing it under lock and key. When the stag-van arrived, he refused to give it up until he received £5 payment (insisting on money down) to be handed over to the poor of Winslow. A £5 note was accordingly procured, and the stag handed over to Lord Rothschild's servant. Later writing in explanation of his conduct, he wrote that he had no objection to hunting, but extracted the "fiver" as a kind of protest against what he termed the "persecution" of Dissenters. This incident probably took place at a Freehold feeding ground known as Piddington's Piece containing 14a 2r 10p in the Parish of Swanbourne. He had bought this land on Wednesday 27th June 1883 for £1,000, being Lot 12: the late property of S.B. Dudley "The Limes", Winslow. The amount of rates paid on buildings and land at Piddington in the Swanbourne Rate book for 1895, in his name was 3s 7d.

A description of him attending an auction sale in 1901 says that: He was a short, stout old gentleman in sober black garments with an old-fashioned coat, and a fine tall hat of the style of other days. His face was round and broad, the features being strong and pronounced - a hearty, cheery face framed in curling, silvery whiskers; while the old black stock that he wore finished a charming portrait. He looked, in fact, the very man told of in the song "A fine old English gentleman, one of the olden times!". He relinquished farming in 1906, and continued to live, until his death in fact at No.3 Horn Street, Winslow. He was buried on the east side of the churchyard where we can still find his memorial stone which states:

**HERE LIES SILVANUS JONES
WHO DIED 6 NOVEMBER 1914
AGED 87 YEARS
HE WAS A HEARTY WORKER
A CAPABLE DILIGENT FARMER
& A MAN OF GREAT HUMOUR
THIS STONE WAS PUT UP
IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE
OF HIM BY HIS ELDEST SON
HENRY ARTHUR JONES**

Henry Arthur Jones received his Education at John Grace's Winslow Classical and Commercial School (founded in 1812) from which he was withdrawn at the tender age of 13, and sent out into the wide world to seek his fortune - as it would appear the literary boy. Long before he was out of his teens he had commenced worrying magazine editors and publishers with his youthful productions, which met however, with no success. At the age of 18 he paid his first visit to the theatre, which was to prove a turning point in his life. He had begun to write of English rural life in his early teens. Disappointment succeeded disappointment, so he left London and obtained a place in a Bradford office, where he was for some time a commercial traveller. When things had seemed at their worst, his opportunity was realised in the year 1879, by Mr Wilson Barrett's acceptance of "A Clerical Error" by which his career as a successful playwright started, and his abilities first noted.

Perhaps his most known melodrama was "The Silver King" of 1882, which ran for 289 nights, banishing all of his pecuniary anxieties. On 10th October 1883 - the 250th night at the Princes's there was a crowded house "brimful of enthusiasm as when the piece was first produced". It being reckoned at this time that the play must have been witnessed by 587,640 persons in London, 441,000 in the provinces and over 320,000 in America, all in all 1,348,640 persons. Many of the playwright's works it was said bear the stamp of genius.

By 1889 it is recorded that his "dramatic star is still in the ascendant", also that he "invokes the muse and works at play-making at all hours of the day and night", in his delightful old-world house at Chalfont St Peter. On Saturday night the 12th December 1891 he expatiated in a highly interesting address at Toynbee Hall, on "Play-making". He asked the audience to regard the play, first, as a piece of literature; secondly, as a representation of life; and lastly, as a series of situations. The literary standpoint he held to be of the chief importance, notwithstanding that the best literary judgment of the age declined to concern itself very much about the modern acted drama, and had instead ruled it outside literature altogether. That was a serious fact for authors, for actors, and for theatre-goers, but he was afraid the substantial justice of the decision could scarcely be called in question. A school of modern realism that founded drama on disease, ugliness and vice was strongly denounced. While on 9th April of the next year, we find: A satirical article upon Mr Henry Arthur Jones, with a portrait by "Spy" appears in this week's issue of Vanity Fair.



During the great unemployment times of the winter 1894-5, he did not forget his "Winslow" for he sent through his father Silvanus the sum of £10 towards soup kitchens, and children's dinners. It has been recorded that: A tendency towards solialistic theories in his younger days, was by his material success to reach the opposite extreme in later life. However upon an influx of Belgian Refugees into Winslow during 1914-15, and in January of the latter year, he showed his kindness to society by offering the loan of his father's old house, No.3 Horn Street, furnished; to the Winslow Relief Committee, as they were expecting twelve Belgians in one week.

H.A. Jones was admitted to several properties in Winslow, including one at Tinker's End in 1916; and another on the Market Square was sold by his direction on April 23rd 1902 for £125.

Jones went on to write about 60 plays, some of which were as well-known in America and France, as in his own country. He cherished views as to the rise of an English school of dramatic literature, also wrote two books on his Art, articles in periodicals, and strove hard for a national theatre, played a prominent part in the agitation for abolition of the censorship, and for the copyright of plays.

His wife Jane Eliza (nee Seeley) died in 1924; while in his latest years he suffered very bad health, and died of pneumonia on Monday the 7th January 1929 aged 77, at his home in Arkwright Road, Hampstead - A BUCKS MAN.

