

# Orlando Whistlecraft Suffolk Weather Prophet - A Life

by  
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During the latter half of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century, there was considerable general interest in the discoveries of science. They thrilled at the demonstrations of science experiments and the latest discoveries. There was also a desire to imbibe the knowledge uncovered by science more deeply, and the many mechanics' institutes across the county catered to this thirst. There was also great interest amongst amateur scientists in observing and recording their findings and then sharing them. The hope was that they would be able to identify new species or a new physical law. One area that attracted interest was the weather. As with today, being able to understand and forecast future weather could have a great impact on planning business activities, such as farming or fishing, as well as outdoor pleasure pursuits.

To support this interest, there were reports in the newspapers on the weather that had just passed and yearly almanacs that purported to predict the year ahead. Most of the almanacs based their predictions on astrology<sup>1</sup>. The official scientific community saw astrology as pseudo-science and tried to distance itself. In 1854, the government set up a department under the Board of Trade, headed by Rear-Admiral Fitzroy, to collect weather data. They collected data from across the country and in 1861 started to publish weather forecasts in the Times but only for the next 24 and 48 hours. This was seen as poor compared to the astrologers who predicted the weather for a year ahead. However, what Fitzroy set up eventually became today's Met Office.

The town of Ipswich was no exception in taking an interest in weather matters. Articles on the weather appeared as early as the 1780s in the Ipswich Journal, although there may have been earlier entries. Weather almanacs written by the so-called weather prophets were also advertised in the Ipswich Journal from around 1780<sup>2</sup>. The county also had its share of amateur weather observers who also published their records of weather and made predictions of the coming weather. One such practitioner was Orlando Whistlecraft and I will use him to examine the life of a country weatherman. The plan is to describe an outline of his life to get a context of how he lived and then look at his published output.

## **Life**

Whistlecraft was a Suffolk native and spent the major part of his life observing and noting the local weather during most of the reign of Queen Victoria. He made predictions of the future weather when weather forecasting was very primitive and published his notes and predictions in books, newspapers and a yearly almanac. He even managed to achieve a level of renown throughout the country. What set him apart from a lot of the weather predictors was that he carefully observed and record the weather and attempted to use scientific methods to predict future weather.

He spent the whole of his adult life in the village of Thwaite in Suffolk. It was a small village with a population of 176 in 1845<sup>3</sup> and is five miles from the nearest town of Eye. Petty Sessions were held once a month at the Buck's Head Inn. It had two cattle fairs, one held on the 30

June, the other held on the 26 November. There is a small local parish church dedicated to St George where Orlando and his children were baptised. It would have been a small, close-knit community in Orlando's time.

According to the parish baptism register, Orlando was born on 11 November 1810 to James Whistlecraft<sup>4</sup> who was described in the 1841 census as 'farmer and shopkeeper'<sup>5</sup> and in the 1851 census as a 'Farmer 50 acres, 3 labourers, master carpenter 2 journeymen'<sup>6</sup>. James was born in 1779 in Stoke Ash, which is the next parish to Thwaite, in a family of three boys and three girls of which he was the second born boy<sup>7</sup>. In 1810, he married Susan Brooke, a widow, at Thwaite parish church<sup>8</sup> and Orlando was their only child. At the time, James was aged about 31 and Susan was about 42.

Susan was born Susan English, baptised in Westhorpe in 1767<sup>9</sup> and married her first husband, Thomas Brooke, at Thwaite church in 1794. They had six children before Thomas Brooke died in 1801 aged 36 and was buried in Thwaite churchyard. The births of their children were spaced between 1794 to 1801. Amongst the boys' names they had an Amos Orlando and a Ferrand prompted by her literary bent which would suggest that Orlando's name was prompted by their mother's interest in Shakespeare's plays. Tracing the children from the first marriage, most of the men died before 1841 and the women married and moved away and so there is no trace of them in the 1841 census for Thwaite.

There is a biographical sketch of Orlando in the 10 November 1859 edition of Suffolk and Essex Free Press<sup>10</sup>. This describes his mother as 'a notable woman of good judgement and business habit and her common sense always led her to encourage the studious tendency which her youngest child manifested and with Shakespearian zeal she had named Orlando'. Although he was strong and healthy at birth, he contracted rheumatic fever and paralysis that led to a contraction of his muscles of the right arm and leg and thus rendering him incapable of performing manual labour. This disease is an auto-immune disease in which the body's defences attack the body's tissues - especially the joints and muscles. He suffered for 12 months but gradually regained strength such that in his 8th year he was sent to school in Stowmarket until December 1820 when he was 10 years old. It is not clear what was special about the school in Stowmarket but when he returned home, he was sent to a local day school and for 3 years trudged to and from school on foot. This exercise proved greatly to his advantage as he subsequently continued to have good general health.

Early on he is said to have evidenced great observational interests and made notes of 'atmospheric phenomena', rural scenery and natural history. His walks to and from school enabled him to indulge this interest. At age seven he is reported to have drawn the likeness of an infant placed in his charge and was taking notes of weather from age eight. To further his education and desire for further learning and using his mother's influence, he was enrolled in St Nicholas Academy in Ipswich run by a Mr Clamp. He was at first a pupil but then became an assistant master. He was there for six years and when he was seventeen joined the Ipswich Mechanics Institute. The following programme of lectures given at the Institute was listed in The Suffolk Chronicle of Saturday 5 January 1828<sup>11</sup> gives a good idea of what was discussed.

Your committee being of opinion that Monday evenings are the most convenient a considerable majority of the subscribers, particularly the operative class, for the delivery of Lectures, have made the following arrangements; —

Jan.	7	Introductory to the Course	E. Lawrance, Esq
	21	Natural History	C. Gross, Esq
Feb.	4	Ichthyology	W. Batley, Esq.
	18	Natural History	C. Gross, Esq.
March	3	Naval Architecture	Mr G. Bayley
	17	Geography	Mr Clamp
	31	Zoology (Homo)	Mr C. Cowell
April	14	Astronomy	Mr Bransby
	28	Horticulture	Mr Paterson
May	12	Anatomy of the Ear	G. Bullen, Esq
	26	Acoustics	Mr Hare
June	9	Electricity	Mr J. King. jun
	23	Ornithology	Mr R Garrod
July	7	Anatomy (Introductory)	Mr G. Sampson
	21	Mechanics (Constitution of Masses)	Mr Adds
Aug.	4	Zoology (Homo)	Mr C. Cowell
	18	Electricity	Mr J. King, jun.
Sept.	1	Mechanics (Motions & Forces)	Mr Adds
	15	Zoology (Amphibia)	VV. Batley, Esq.
	29	Botany	Mr Bentley
Oct.	13	Hydraulics	Mr W. Scott
	27	Anatomy	Mr G. Sampson
Nov.	10	Chemistry	Mr Winckworth
	24	Naval Architecture	Mr G. Bayley
Dec.	8	Chemistry	Mr Winckworth
	22	History of Engraving	Mr Piper

In later life, Whistlecraft wrote about his time in Ipswich and his acquaintance with Dr Hamilton, a medical doctor, and Mr John Bransby, astronomer and mathematician, both of whom he says kept weather journals.

In 1829 at the age of 19, he returned to live in Thwaite where he opened a school and had a fair number of pupils for a small village. He married Elizabeth Rush, the daughter of James and Amy Rush, in March 1834. She was born in April 1810 at Little Stonham so she was roughly the same age as Orlando. James Rush was a farmer who had farmed at Great Blakenham, then Little Soham and ended up at Thwaite. We know this from the 16 children his wife Amy bore him and had baptised in the local churches. The first child to be baptised in Thwaite and entered into the baptism register was in 1822. Amy was buried in Thwaite churchyard in 1836 aged only 49<sup>12</sup>.

In 1843 he was still teaching in Thwaite but he felt he was 'wearing himself up by sharpening other blades' and he, therefore, gave up the school and set up as a shopkeeper which gave him more time to pursue his meteorological studies<sup>13</sup>. It might also have been prompted by the realisation that he might not be able to support his wife and family on what he could make from school mastering. It also probably helped being married, in that his wife could help in the shop. From the census entries, it appears that he continued in business in the retail trade through the rest of his life. This might be a continuation of his father's business as his father was listed in the 1841 census as being a shopkeeper.

In 1847 his mother died. He must have been very close to her as in her obituary was included a verse that must have been written by Orlando<sup>14</sup>. It certainly reflects a poetic bent which he was also to show in his meteorological work.

2nd inst., aged 79 sincerely beloved and esteemed by all who knew her, Susan, the wife of James Whistlecraft, of Thwaite, and mother of Orlando Whistlecraft, observator, of that place. She had resided above 53 years in the parish, and during her long and useful life had always studied for the comfort of all around her, however much she might sacrifice her own; could she but serve others, and administer to their wants, she was satisfied. Her loss will be felt, and her memory long revered.

Her spirit rests! - the wife and mother dear -  
As full of years, and full of Christ, she fell!  
A life of care and usefulness she left  
In joy eternal with her god to dwell!  
The trials and crosses of this world she knew  
And, in submission, all alike she bore;  
Awaiting, cheerfully, kind Heaven's release.  
'Tis come; and bliss is hers for evermore!

His father survived several more years, passing away in October 1867 aged 88<sup>15</sup>. However, no obituary for his father came up in a search of the local papers in the National Newspaper Archive.

Over time Orlando and Elizabeth had 6 children.

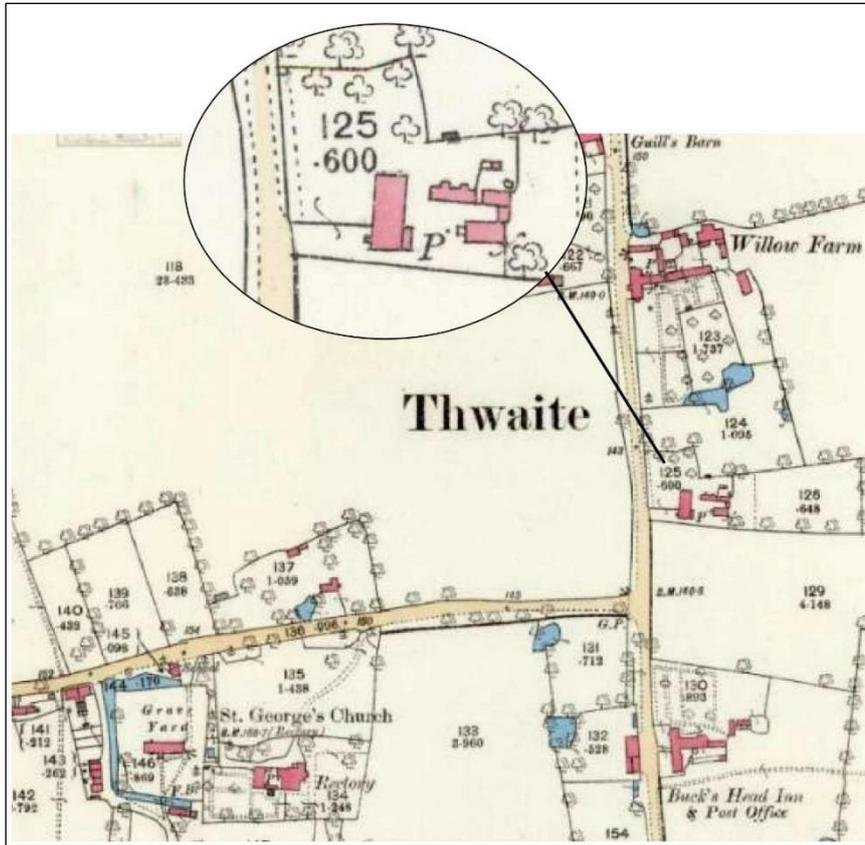
Diana Elizabeth born 4 Jul 1834  
Julia Salus born 23 Nov 1835  
Orlando born 27 Apr 1836  
Caroline born 9 March 1838  
Arthur born 14 Oct 1840 but not baptised until 1850  
Amelia Susan baptised 17 Jul 1850<sup>16</sup>

Orlando and Elizabeth settled into Minerva Cottage in Thwaite with father James living next door. In 1841 his mother, Susan was still living with James. Orlando and Elizabeth had all five of their children living with them and in the 1841 census,<sup>17</sup> Orlando is described as Stationer and schoolmaster. By the 1851 census, Susan had died and Diana Elizabeth, Orlando junior and Caroline were living next door with Orlando's father, James, and the rest of the children were still living with their parents<sup>18</sup>. In that census, Orlando is described as 'Author & Publisher on natural phenomena grocer draper & general retailer' whilst his father, James is described as 'Farmer 50 acres, 3 labourers, master carpenter 2 journeymen'.

We can get a good idea of Minerva Cottage from newspaper articles and the sales particulars of his house. The Cottage is on the turnpike from Norwich to Ipswich and on the 1885 OS map, it is shown as the next house north from the Buck Inn and on the east of the turnpike road. It is described in a newspaper account in 1892<sup>19</sup> which gives a subjective feel for what his house felt like.

On the main road between Ipswich and Norwich, just beyond Thwaite Buck's Head—a famous hostelry the old coaching days, and still flourishing roadside inn—there stands a roomy and somewhat rambling edifice which was evidently one time the homestead of a small farm. At one end, the window has been thrown out in the form of a shop-front; beyond the business quarter lies a commodious sitting-room; overhead, two or three dormer windows jut out from the thatched roof; and the large garden in front, laid out in

beds with high borders of box, in this time of the year bright with old-fashioned flowers, conspicuous amongst them being luxuriant growth of hardy fuchsias. It is a wonderfully quiet and secluded spot, where the only event of human interest is the passing by of an occasional vehicle.



Thwaite from the OS Suffolk XXXVI.14 Surveyed: 1884, published in 1885



**The Whistlecrafts' Minerva Cottage in Thwaite**

There is a more detailed description of the pair of cottages owned by Whistlecraft from the sales particulars when Whistlecraft's executors put his houses up for auction. They are described as a

Dwelling House containing General Shop, Two front sitting rooms, four bed rooms, two attics, pantry, wash house and coal house. Excellent large garden with fruit trees, enclosed from the highway by a substantial brick wall and now in the occupation of Mrs Orlando Whistlecraft.

Also, in the rear of the above, a capital slatted dwelling house containing two sitting rooms, kitchen, pantry and four bed rooms.

Also, a spacious detached building containing three rooms (formerly used as a school room), pony stable, gig house, coal and hay houses and exceeding productive large garden, now in the occupation of Mr Alfred Ashford: the whole property covers an area of 1a. 1r. 17p. or thereabouts, abuts upon the property of Mr E Baker, and is well supplied with good spring water from a pump<sup>20</sup>.

The biographical sketch was published in November 1859 as he was about to enter his 50th year and described his appearance<sup>21</sup>.

Personally, he is a man rather above the middle stature, with a large and high forehead, dark curly hair, in which no silver is yet interlined, and a profusion of whiskers. His face is rather sallow in appearance, but it is nevertheless a healthy-looking phiz. His earnest grey eye lights up a thoughtful and meditative countenance and his tenacious memory, jocosive manners, and natural vivacity of disposition, render his easy and playfully satirical conversation exceedingly interesting. He writes well with his left hand, and sketches in water colours with great facility. In very many respects ORLANDO WHISTLECRAFT is a remarkable instance of the pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.



**Portrait of Orlando Whistlecraft**

## **Publications**

In this section, we want to look at how Whistlecraft communicated with the public via his publications. There is no evidence that he gave talks or presentations. The only occasion when he might have done, is suggested in the paper to the Ipswich Farmers' Club in 1861, read to the meeting by the secretary.

In his Rural Gleanings, he stated that his aim in his publications<sup>22</sup> was that,

our records of daily things should be such as to be read by all, and clearly understood by all, kept in a plain manner, without technical terms, and not as we see them stuck in the periodicals, so as to interest only those who sent them. No, we want regular reports under an extensive co-operation, rendered so by their being put out in a clear and generally interesting form.

So where did he get his data? Whistlecraft collected daily weather information from his garden in Thwaite and noted it in a daily journal. His extant journals from 1827, when he was 17 right up to 1892, only a few weeks before his death, are now held in the Royal Meteorological Society Library<sup>23</sup>. The data he collected comprised the maximum and minimum temperature, rainfall, wind direction and force, pressure and descriptive notes on weather events for each

day. He also compiled summary statistics for the month with a description of significant trends in the weather.

The keeping of a weather journal was a popular pastime for the Victorians and sometime before that. There are a significant number of such journals in the catalogue of the Royal Meteorological Society library which must be only a small number of those actually kept and there would have been more, less formal ones. The collection of weather data has continued to the present day with enthusiastic amateur weather watchers.

There is evidence in his journal that he corresponded with other like-minded people across the country. In the flyleaf of his journal covering 1838 to 1844, he has a list of people with whom he corresponds. In particular, he notes in his journal that he first corresponded with Thomas Pallant of Redgrave in 1837 when Whistlecraft would have been 27 and living back at Thwaite, and Pallant would have been 64<sup>24</sup>. Whistlecraft visited Pallant several times a year from 1838 until Pallant died in 1842 aged 69. He says that Pallant's Meteorological Journals for 1786 to 1842 were presented to him in 1843. So, there is a sort of network of weather correspondents of which Whistlecraft was a member. However, there is no evidence that Whistlecraft supplied data as part of the government Meteorological Office reporting stations.

In most of his publications he quotes past weather events and trends and to do this he would have made use of his Journals and those he inherited from Thomas Pallant.

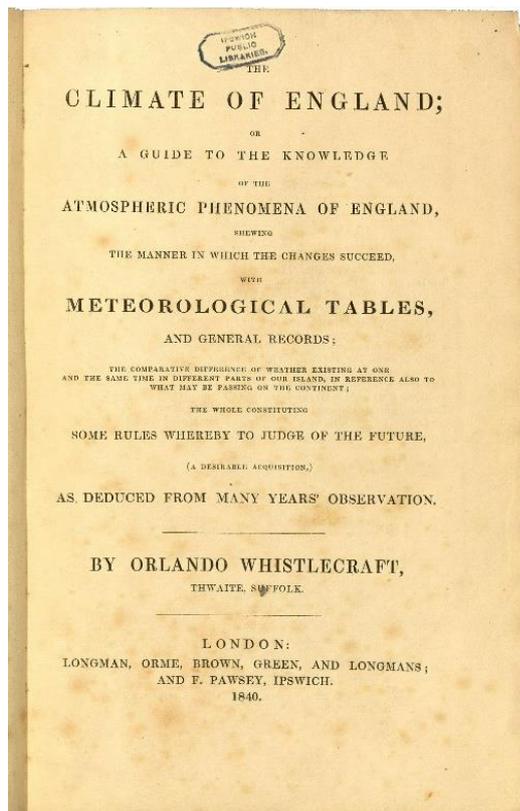
He employed these in the compilation of his publications both newspapers and books, to contrast current conditions with previous years. He would then supplement it with the information he received from his correspondents from across the country. He must have appreciated that people then, like today, like to hear of current weather extremes and how they compare with past weather and maybe be reminded of the weather they experienced in the past.

### **Books**

Whistlecraft did not start his publishing career with publications on the weather but rather on moral and religious subjects. Between 1832 and 1842 he published some moral and religious pamphlets with his first being *An attempt to set forth the Christ of God above the false Christs of men and the only mediator Jesus Christ, who is the supreme head, king and husband of the church*.<sup>25</sup> He followed this in 1836 with *A scriptural Letter' from a humble student*.<sup>26</sup> In 1842 he published *A word in season: or, letters to my young friends on the follies of the age, and expositions and applications of scripture*. This might well have been prompted by his experience as a schoolmaster in Ipswich and Thwaite.<sup>27</sup>

His earliest meteorological publication was *A Tabular Statement of the Thermometer* which was published in 1835 when Whistlecraft would have been aged 25 and is mentioned in his biography.<sup>28</sup> However, a copy of this publication could not be located so there may be no copies still in existence.

In 1840 he published his *Climate of England* in which he describes various weather phenomena and ways of predicting the weather. It also contains lists of his monthly observations from 1830 to 1839.<sup>29</sup> It is written so that the information is accessible to the general reader. He includes chapters on rain, snow and hail; dew; fogs and mists; frosts; clouds; thunder and lightning; temperature and winds and speculates on what might be their



cause. He includes a summary of past weather from medieval times up to contemporary times, drawing on the data he has recorded in his journal. However, it is not clear where he obtained the very old data before the start of his journals. The reporting of past weather is a trend we see repeated in his subsequent publications. Apart from his Almanacs, this is the work for which he is most remembered.

In 1846 Whittlecraft published *The Magnificent and Notably Hot Summer of 1846*<sup>30</sup> which reported on the four months June to September of that year. In his introduction, he says, 'the unusual splendour of 1846, and therefore inform our successors, how enchanting was its summer, and what remarkable facts the observer of the time had to note, and surpassing all on record!'. It uses a similar format for reporting as he had already used in his *Climate of England*.

**Title page from *Climate of England***

Ten years after he published *Climate of England*, he published *Rural Gleanings*<sup>31</sup>. To an extent, this was an update of the earlier book. However, it is more romantic and even rather sentimental. For example, in his introductory essay, he describes a seven-year-old going for a walk with their elder sister and being enraptured by the wild flowers in the hedgerows. He again characterises the weather for each month as he had done in *Climate of England* but precedes each month with a poem which he claims he wrote when he was only sixteen years old. He does add additional general statements such as 'Sharp frost never comes on unless the wind quits the rainy quarters and blows keenly between N.W. and E and the most severe do not occur till after a great fall of snow, and the sky subsequently clearing'. Using his weather journal, he gives a general summary of weather from 1840 through to 1851 which is presented as narrative text rather than as tables. There follows a section of historic weather from about 200 up to 1850 and is divided into frosts and snow; winds and rains; droughts and heats; and thunder and lightning. He then gives a month-by-month summary which contains more general observations than he allowed himself in *Climate of England* but also covers natural occurrences such as what is in flower in the month and what the farmer should be doing.

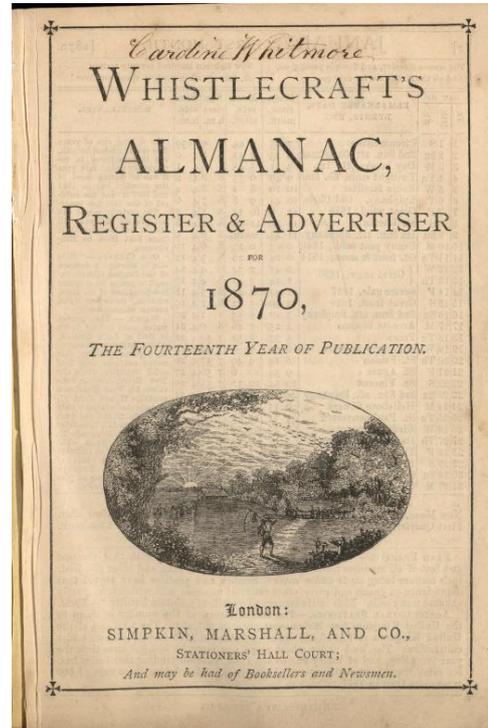
In 1861 he published *Meteorology: Its Importance to All Men, Especially Farmers Containing Certain Signs of Coming Weather for The Quarter, Week, Or Day*.<sup>32</sup> On the title page it says that it was read before the meeting of the Ipswich Farmers' club. The Ipswich Journal reporting the meeting states that Whittlecraft did not attend and the paper was read to the meeting by the secretary.<sup>33</sup> As the title suggests this is mainly about short-term forecasting based on observations of various natural phenomena. He uses examples drawn from his experience probably aided by his journals.

His final publication, other than the almanacs, was *Variations of the Seasons in the East Parts of England* which was published in 1882 and added an addendum to take it up to 1888.<sup>34</sup> In it,

he includes summaries on the main aspects of the weather for each year from 1811 through to 1882. He then provides tables of tree bud opening, harvest time, monthly temperatures and rainfall covering each of the years. He then uses the addendum to take his coverage up to 1888.

He had for many years published weather reports for a fortnight in advance in the local papers which were considered reasonably accurate so it was suggested that he should write an almanac. An Ipswich bookseller and stationer, Mr J M Burton, provided further encouragement<sup>35</sup>. One motivation was that the publication of Almanacs was very profitable. Moore's alone sold around 517,000 copies in 1838. In 1833 the Stationers' Company recorded profits of about £4,000 spread over eleven titles; in 1835, it cut prices, doubled sales, and made profits of £5,000<sup>36</sup>.

His first almanac of 1857, entitled simply *The Weather Almanac*, was mainly a month-by-month prediction of weather and church festivals, with related topics and came to about 40 pages. The number of pages increased slowly across the next decade changing its title in 1863 to *The Weather Almanac adapted for general use by its extension Commercial, Rural and Other Information*. He may have done this to increase its general appeal. It now contained 72 pages. In 1865 he changed the title to *The Weather Almanac and Meteorological and Rural Handbook* and the following year *A Handbook of Meteorological, Agricultural, Rural and General Information*. In 1871 he included adverts, expanded the size to over 100 pages and retitled it *Whistlecraft's Almanac Register & Advertiser*. From then on it continued in that format.

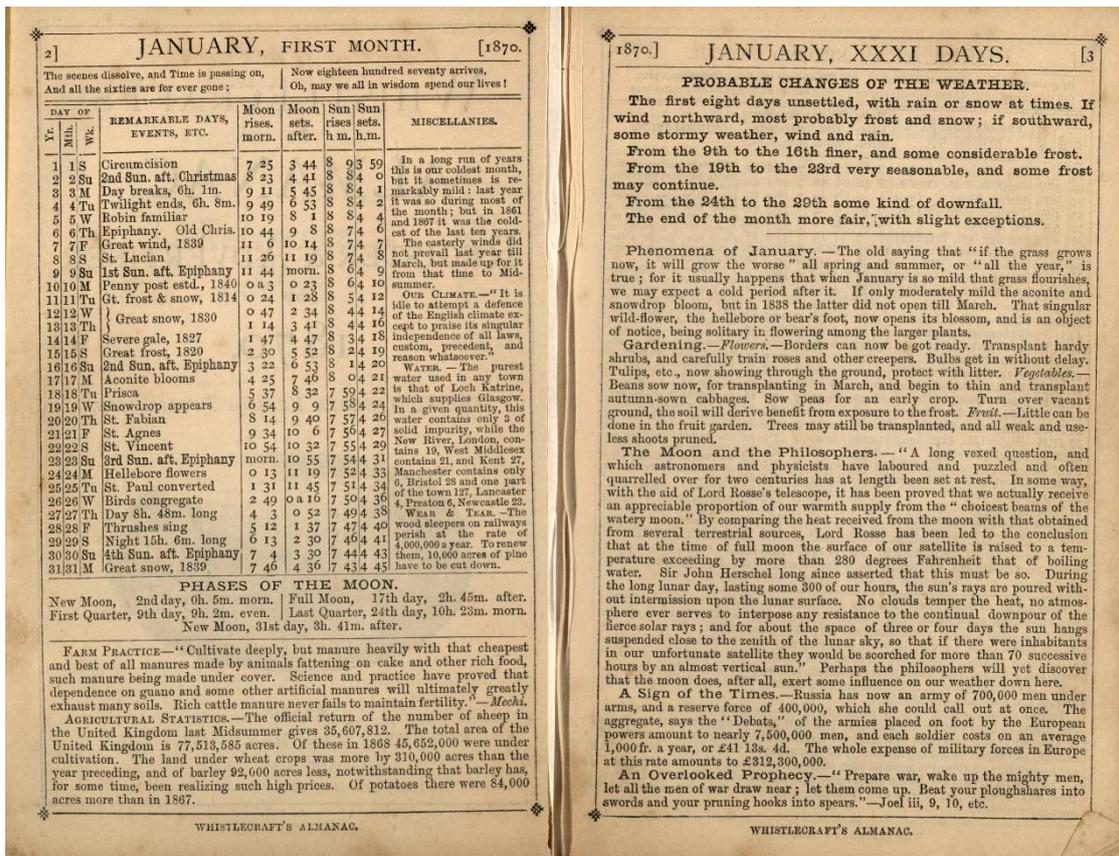


**Title Page from the Almanac of 1875**

In the first year the almanac sold between 4,000 and 5,000 copies and the next year 8,000; in 1862 the circulation ran up to 10,000 while many more might have been disposed of if they had been in print. After that, there was a gradual decrease, but in the end, he had a circulation of 4,000 or 5,000 copies<sup>37</sup>.

The main focus of each almanac was the summary of the monthly weather and events for each month of the year. Each month had two pages with the first giving the past events etc. associated with each day of the month and the rising and setting times of the sun and moon. It also included the phases of the moon. The next page gives the weather predictions for the month and a comparison with the same month in previous years based on his journal entries. The almanacs also contain articles and observations on natural history, farming as well as the usual things that were included in other almanacs.

These became well-received across the country, especially amongst the farming community. He continued to publish every year for 30 years right up to 1886, which was only 5 years before his death.



January page from the Almanac for 1870

However, there was sometimes dissatisfaction with his predictions but also many endorsements such as the following extracts from the Ipswich Journal of 30 August criticising his predictions.<sup>38</sup>

MR. WHISTLECRAFT'S PROGNOSTICATIONS.

To the Editor of the Ipswich Journal.

Sir, -The very glorious harvest weather we have been enjoying for the last ten or eleven days, compels me to ask Mr Whistlecrafft through the columns of your Journal, to what part of England the following description of the weather, as taken from his Almanac for this month applies? - "I fear a rather unfavourable period for all the late farms, from the 17th day of the month." This description does not apply in the least to the part of England from which I now write - Suffolk, Mr Whistlecrafft's own county, as since the fatal 17th, more glorious weather could not possibly be conceived; and in looking through the columns of the Times, which every Monday describes the state of the market and of the weather, it is one universal theme of praise for the splendid sunshine of last week.

Now, Sir, since the weather Almanac breaks down at the most important period of the year, and in so signal a manner, what faith can we possibly have in the one which is now being prepared for next year?

Let me advise Mr Whistlecrafft to omit these weather prognostications altogether, and confine himself to a simple record of facts in connection with the weather. These are highly interesting, while those by him are open to the charge of being (what I fear is the case in the matter of his weather prophecies) mere charlatanism. I enclose my card, and beg to subscribe myself, as on former occasions,

Your obedient servant,

August 26th, 1862.

CENSOR.

A similar comment from The Ipswich Journal of November 1862.<sup>39</sup>

#### **WEATHER PROGNOSTICATIONS.**

To the Editor of the Ipswich Journal.

Sir,-In your last publication, I notice a letter signed "Censor," asking, in my opinion, some very pertinent questions in reference to the so-called "Weather Almanac," and as one who; like "Censor," has decidedly a word to say on that subject, will, with your kind permission, make known the "sorrows of a poor old man" who confesses to have been for several years so signally taken in and done for, by Mr Whistlecrafts "extraordinary production," as to become for the present year of grace perfectly disgusted.

I will not go so far as to charge Mr Whistlecraft with dishonesty in the compilation of his several issues, but has it not been the fact that where those meteorological ventures have proved somewhere within the mark, they have been paraded up and down, page upon page, till a feeling of nausea comes across the reader? And what a compliment to our memories too! Really, Sir, one is inclined to think Mr Whistlecraft must fancy our generation unusually prolific in "Suffolk Worthies" (read bangs.) And has not the Author been extremely careful to exclude without shadow of reason, all the many, as I call them, lamentable failures? I am fond of looking at both sides of a picture, and take from memory, at random, an instance to which Mr Whistlecraft never in the slightest degree alluded: that famous December, wherein was made his most desperate plunge into an unseen future, Why did Mr Whistlecraft prophesy it to be a "stormy month throughout," when the fulfilment-and your readers who have marked him well will bear me out- was as beautiful a twelfth as any of the three sixty-five.

In conclusion, Sir, I would suggest to Mr Whistlecraft to be a whit more humble in his determination to have even the elements succumb to his babblings. Let him take to heart the words of a greater writer than himself, that "he is a bold man who ventures to predict the coming weather in so changeable a climate as the English," and we are tired of hearing that rain, hail, sleet, snow, or something else may come on or about certain days, and if not then at some other time; if the wind be in the South 'twill be warmer than from the North; and if S.W. expect rain, &c., &c. All such twaddle the verist dolt of a schoolboy is expected to understand.

But I cannot see why "Censor" should offer to take so much trouble in the preparation of his opposition almanac, to be entitled "The weather as it may be," for I will engage to say that, one hour's writing, far enough from the "proof sheets" will do the business, and when done shall run no unworthy race for public favour with our "Thwaite" friend.

Apologising, Mr Editor, for so long trespassing upon your time and patience,

I remain, your most obedient servant,

Ipswich, Oct. 29, 1862.

**SILLY SUFFOLK.**

A supporter refuted these criticisms in The Ipswich Journal.<sup>40</sup>

#### **MR. WHISTLECRAFT AND "CENSOR"**

To the Editor of the Ipswich Journal.

Sir, - On the 1st inst., I read in your Journal a letter signed "Censor" criticising "Mr Whistlecraft's prognostications;" I have also read in your Journal of the 5th inst. "Meteorological Report for June and July, 1863," by Mr Whistlecraft, and as Censor "leaves the question to the verdict of the public," I for one consider this latter statement a complete refutation of Censor's remarks. For the last twelve years, I have taken a memorandum of the changes of the atmosphere cold, heat, rain, violent tempests, and other natural phenomena; the date. continuance, &c. I have looked over these memorandums and find that Mr Whistlecraft is on the whole correct. I have read most Weather Almanacs published, and compared them with that of Mr Whistlecraft, and

have no hesitation in saying the latter is the truest and best I have seen, which my memorandums will corroborate: and one fact is much better than ten arguments. I have never seen Mr Whistlecraft, and therefore do not know him personally, but being an admirer of his works and finding him unjustly assailed, I think it nothing but fair to use my humble efforts to assist one to whom the farmers and others owe such obligations. I do not for a moment question the motive of Censor's letter of the 1st inst., no doubt actuated "pro bono publico," as most Cynic's generally are: but why sign anonymously? He may possess the abilities of a Newton; why hide his light under a bushel? "Censor" can see my memorandums if he thinks proper, and if you please you can hand him my name and address.

I remain, Sir, your humble servant,  
Old Newton, 11th Aug. 1863

J.H.

The last almanac to be published by Whistlecraft was in 1886 and in 1888 it was incorporated into Glyde's Official Directory for the county of Suffolk<sup>41</sup> A couple of years later Glyde's directory was incorporated into Knight's County Handbook.

### Newspaper articles

Whistlecraft's newspaper items were a way to get to his biggest audience. He started from about 1833, to send occasional reports on weather to the Ipswich Journal and Suffolk Chronicle in which endeavour, he states, he was encouraged by his friend Thomas Pallant.<sup>42</sup> By 1870 he was contributing a weekly meteorological notes section to the Ipswich Journal. These notes ran from 1870 to 1889 which was just 3 years before he died. Here is an example from The Ipswich Journal<sup>43</sup>.

### METEOROLOGICAL NOTES.

(By Orlando Whistlecraft.)

Report for the week ending February 20th, 1889.

Feb. 1889	Min. Ther	Max Ther	Wind	Rain	Character
Th 14	Deg 33	Deg 45	S.W.	---	Mild and partly cloudy
Fri 15	33½	43	N.W.	---	Bright, with bleak wind.
Sat 16	26	45	S.W.	.04	Clear a.m., then overcast.
Sun 17	36	55	S.W.	---	Bright warm and pleasant.
Mon 18	39	56	S.W.	---	Bright and warm.
Tues 19	42	50	W.	---	Mild, hazy and breezy.
Wed 20	35	47½	W.	.01	Unsettled, little sun

THURSDAY, February 14th. Great change, mild and cloudy, with a great fall of the barometer since last night, less cloudy towards evening, and calm atmosphere. Fine night, wind veered to west, and became clear, with more wind.

FRIDAY, February 15th. Clear morning, and a bleak air from N.W. The day mostly bright. with some grey clouds, and a rough and chilling wind, and barometer rising. Less wind after four p.m.

SATURDAY, February 16th. Frost in the early morning hours; bright till near 10 a.m., afterwards hazy, thick, and overcast. Very gloomy most of the afternoon; more wind after four p.m., and a stormy and lowering appearance in the atmosphere, with a continued decline of the barometer. Some rain in the evening.

SUNDAY, February 17th. Red clouds at sunrise; mild and breezy, but a bright morning, and the barometer much risen again during night past. Bright day, with some light clouds, and a warm and very pleasant afternoon, with a gentle wind varying between west and south alternately.

MONDAY, February 18th. Bright morning, and nearly calm, with a high barometer and S.W. wind. Continued most of the day bright and warm for the season, wind S.W. as in the morning, but a little brisker. Became cloudy at three p.m. Wind gusty at night, but mild and fine.

TUESDAY, February 19th and breezy morning, chiefly hazy, but clearer after two p.m., and some gleams of sun more than before. The evening more un-settled and lowering; fine night but rather colder, and the barometer about to decline again.

WEDNESDAY, February 20th. Cloudy, unsettled, and cooler breeze. Barometer considerably lower slight rain at times, with gleams of sun between. A stormy-looking sky, but at present chiefly fair.

**THE RECENT BITING BLAST.**

Though long forbearing Winter stood,  
Pinch us at last be thought he would  
However late he made us smart,  
And played indeed a cruel part.

With fury on our western shores  
He entered with his icy stores,  
Leaving his mark on sea and land,  
Events most sad on either hand.

Excessive frost beyond our mean,  
Result of gale so extra keen;  
A robe of snow the wheat to shield  
Spread o'er the sod in every field.

Hence mercy still attends the rod,  
'Tis so with all the works of God;  
It bids us to be patient all,  
Whatever to our lot may fall.

But soon the scene will altered be,  
And that we shall be glad to see;  
When vernal skies the brighter grow,  
And Flora makes a cheering show.

When for the bird's nest urchins run,  
As in the sport they find much fun;  
So once did we all now can say,  
But that from us has pass'd away.

The change or remission of frost which we said was near, came very suddenly on, before our words were in type. But the very variable winds and temperature and pressure continue to some extent, although a cessation of the recent severity. It has been a very notable and peculiar season thus far at least.

Sunday last, the 17th, was a most lovely spring-like day, and the afternoon was more especially warm and pleasant, and much enjoyed by those who availed themselves of such a treat so soon after the goneby [sic] bitter storm. And the 18th proved equally bright and cheering. Vegetation became awake, while to man and beast it was grateful to the sense. It appears that we have had less rain by far of late than in the Metropolitan districts, or in the West of England. A favourable interval just now for pea and bean seeding, and which in most cases has been made use of. The changes between unusual mildness and great severity have been most abrupt both ways, and repeatedly so, such as we scarcely ever before witnessed, even so that although a very few days were exceptionally severe, the aggregate of the winter is proved to be less cold than the previous two of 1887 and 1888, and may we now realise a genial spring, not having had one since the splendid year 1884.

**FORECASTS UP TO FEBRUARY 27th, 1889.**

Still very changeable as of late but on or about the 24th some more decisive condition of the atmosphere seems likely to be coming on.

Thwaite, February 20th, 1889.

In this report, he describes the weather for the week in four ways, tabular, daily description, poem and trend. Finally, we get a forecast for the coming week in fairly general terms. Comparing the daily descriptions with the entries in his journal for the same period shows some similarity but there was also some considerable rewriting to include comments on the measured data. These reports were sufficiently frequent, one per week without fail, that it is possible the paper might have paid him for the column to help keep poverty at bay. The fact that this column ran for so long and that they only stopped because of Whistlecraft's ill-health, is evidence that they were popular and appreciated.

**The End**

By the 1870s, it seems that his shop and publication businesses did not provide enough to keep him and his family. Here is an appeal in The Ipswich Journal - Saturday 26 August 1871<sup>44</sup>. The 1870s was the start of an agricultural depression that did not ease until the First World War.

**CORRESPONDENCE.**

**AN APPEAL.**

To the Editor of the Ipswich Journal.

Sir, - Our meteorological friend. Orlando Whistlecraft is in great distress. His barometer has fallen below zero, even in the midst of harvest. It is wonderful how it makes a man feel below freezing point when he is appealed to for a little quicksilver to fill up the vacancy in a poor man's barometer. ....

Having appealed to me for help, I have taken the best method I can of answering that appeal by recommending his case to your readers. I gladly send you, Sir, my guinea for him, with the hope that you will kindly receive subscriptions in his behalf. When some of your wealthier readers have lent a helping hand to a poor old meteorological correspondent, who cannot, like Mechi, get to the Tip-top-tree of agricultural reputation by all his observations, but must be content with what he can

get in fair weather or in foul, then you shall be at liberty to publish my name, not at the head of the list, but at the bottom of as long a one as you can admit into your Journal. Meanwhile

I remain, Sir, your humble servant,

A HARVESTMAN.

Waveney Valley, August 21st, 1871.

[We shall be glad to receive further subscriptions. - Ed. I. J.]

The Ipswich Journal of Thursday 25 March 1886 reported that he had had a bad fall and had fractures of the small bone in his right leg<sup>45</sup>. This does not seem to have repaired itself as in the Bury and Norwich Post of Tuesday 22 December 1891<sup>46</sup> we have another letter, that explains Whistlecraft's health was weak and he was having to support Arthur his ailing son.

#### **CORRESPONDENCE.**

##### **ORLANDO WHISTLECRAFT.**

##### **TO THE EDITOR.**

Sir, — Does anyone feel inclined to brighten our old friend's Christmas? Orlando Whistlecraft, who, as many will remember, brought out for a number of years a very useful and entertaining weather almanac, is eighty-one years old, very helpless and infirm, confined to his bed for five or six years with a broken leg, with scanty means, and quite unable to earn anything. Ever so little help for the coming year would be real kindness and most acceptable.

Yours truly,

H.C.

[Our correspondent made a similar appeal last year on behalf of poor old Whistlecraft, which was fairly successful, and we have no doubt many sympathetic hearts will respond to the invitation for another year. The veteran's address is Thwaite, Eye. Ed.]

Yet despite his infirmity, he managed to continue to publish his almanacs right up to 1886 and his newspaper reports up to 1889. He died on Monday 27th February 1893 at the age of 83 which was a considerable age for the time. His passing was noted across the country with obituaries not only in Suffolk papers but also in Bedfordshire, Lancashire, Worcestershire, Kent, Oxfordshire, Antrim (Northern Ireland), Dunbartonshire (Scotland), Monmouthshire, (Wales), and Glamorgan, (Wales).

The Framlingham Weekly News gave a fulsome obituary.<sup>47</sup>

#### **DEATH OF ORLANDO WHISLECRAFT**

We regret to announce the death of Mr Orlando Whistlecraft, who having spent eighty-two years here disappears from an arena to whose enlightenment had various ways contributed. Mr Whistlecraft had long studied the science of meteorology, and sought to predict the probable weather a climate proverbial for its fickleness He came sufficiently close to the mark to gain the confidence of the public. "What does Whistlecraft say?" was a question frequently put when the weather was unusually eccentric. What he had to say might be seen in his "Almanac" which at one time had a good circulation, and was considered an authority on the subject. That Mr. Whistlecraft was a close student of nature is evident, and that he sought to turn his observations to the public benefit is undoubted. Here and there you find man unpretentious in his ways and humble in his aspirations, dwelling in some, obscure locality, enjoying local fame. The deceased was one of these. If a stranger happened to visit the locality, he would be sure to have

pointed out to him the house in which Mr. Whistlecraft lived. In this incidental way was his reputation proclaimed. It came to be recognised that he had a sort of copyright in the weather, hence the popularity of his predictions. At ripe old age he gathered to his fathers. The avenue leading to the grave was darkened by affliction; but the storm is over, and let us hope that it is all fair weather with him now.

And so did The Ipswich Journal - Saturday 04 March 1893<sup>48</sup> which gives a somewhat more balanced assessment of Whistlecraft's achievements.

#### **FARMING NOTES.**

##### **[FROM OUR AGRICULTURAL CORRESPONDENT]**

So poor old Orlando Whistlecraft is no more. Those of us who are able to look back close upon half a century will feel that a light has been extinguished. Younger men can, perhaps, scarcely enter into the spirit of that expression, but older men can remember when their fathers, a little dubious about the state of the elements, particularly at a critical time like harvest, used to don their spectacles and go solemnly to the old bureau and consult Orlando. Not that they had profound faith in his predictions-at least they used to say they had not-but still they used to like to steady their worst apprehensions by just "seeing what old Whistlecraft has to say." Old-fashioned people, perhaps, attached a little more value to weather predictions than we do in the present day. We live at a much more rapid rate; information as to the weather is served up hot every few hours, and we have learned to attach a good deal of importance to these daily services, because they are on the whole so far reliable that you may sow, within an hour or two almost, when a storm may be expected. In Whistlecraft's younger time things were very different. He had not the field of prediction entirely to himself. There were other "authorities" who were in the field long before his name became familiar in almost every household in Suffolk. Perhaps the great feature about his predictions was the skilful way in which they were worded. Whatever the character of the weather on a particular day, the description could be made to fit in somehow. Of course he was at times as wide of the mark as it was possible for a man to be, but then people only smile & and said, " Old Whistlecraft is wrong this time." In saying that his predictions were carefully worded I do not mean to suggest that there was any intention to deceive, or that he assumed the qualities of prophet with the sole object of gain. His heart was in the work; and while you were in conversation with him in the garden at his modest home at Thwaite, his small, bright grey eyes seemed to be always on the watch for some indication in the heavens of a change in the weather. Nothing is perhaps more remarkable than the constant watchfulness which he was able to turn to such good account. I doubt very much if there was any column in the Ipswich Journal which was scanned with greater interest and pleasure, by country people especially, than the one containing Orlando Whistlecraft's review of the weather each day of the week, and his prediction for the coming week, while the poetry must not be forgotten. It was not quite Tennysonian in its sublimity, but still there were the breathings of a quaint old soul who evidently. had an intense love for the marvels, beauties and a grandeur of nature. These weekly meteorological records had, as I say, a special interest at the time, and they may prove useful in future. He rendered valuable service to his county during his long life, and there will be very many who will mourn that the hand of death has put a stop to a work which, if not of an inviting character to the majority of men, had a future as well as a present value. It is not every man who is qualified to take up the prophetic mantle, or that would care to do it if he had the qualification, for work of the kind as carried out by old Whistlecraft-everybody called by him -'old" in a familiar kind of way, for he was always looked upon very much as if he was public property-during so many years, must have required close attention almost night and day, and every sensible

change in the condition of the elements must have been made a note of at the time: it was not a sort of thing to be put off. " Peace to his ashes," say one and all of us.

Orlando was buried in Thwaite churchyard and a cast-iron grave marker was added later by his friends. In his will, he made his son Orlando Whistlecraft junior and Arthur Waters Preston gentleman his executors and trustees. Arthur Waters Preston was a solicitor, horticulturist and meteorologist of Christchurch Lodge, Eaton, Norwich. The will requested that the executors sell part of his estate and put the money into a trust to support his wife while she still lived and then equally divide the residue between his surviving children<sup>49</sup>. The house was advertised for sale in the East Anglian Daily Times of July 1893<sup>50</sup>, and the furniture in the Framlingham Weekly News of August 1893<sup>51</sup>. The whole estate came to just £46 7s.

His wife, Elizabeth only survived him by a year and was buried in Thwaite churchyard on the 8th February 1894<sup>52</sup>. Not many of his children survived him. Diana Elizabeth married James Kerry at Thwaite<sup>53</sup> but died in 1864 in the Thetford district<sup>54</sup>. Julia Salus married George Baalham at Colchester in 1864<sup>55</sup> and moved to Whitechapel Road in London where she died in 1867<sup>56</sup>. Orlando junior learned the trade of carpentry from his grandfather and practised in Wetheringsett where he was also described in the census as a jobbing gardener<sup>57</sup> and died in 1913<sup>58</sup>. Arthur stayed with his father till the end but died only 12 weeks after him<sup>59</sup>. Amelia Susan died shortly after her birth and was laid to rest in May 1852<sup>60</sup>. Caroline married William Godfrey<sup>61</sup> and lived a couple of doors down from her father. William was almost 20 years older than Caroline and they had no children. William died in 1911<sup>62</sup> and Caroline in 1920<sup>63</sup>.

APRIL 1852.						
April.	Baro. meter	Wind.	Thermometer out doors, 9' high	Natural Occurrences.		Thermometer in room
W. 28.	30.27 -09	SE <sub>1</sub> SSW <sub>3</sub> S <sub>2</sub>	30 52 63	Frost early, then fog till after 7, bright and warm day with haze & dappled clouds; Even <sup>g</sup> cloudy, and a warm breeze. - Rain after 9 pm. -		53
Th. 29.	29.71 -80	SW <sub>2</sub> SW <sub>3</sub>	45 57 63	Close and rain early, and much warmer. Dear little Amelia Susan - died at 20 mins before 7 am: aged 23 months. Cloudy & close day, little wet at times. Even <sup>g</sup> also close & cloudy. -		58
F. 30.	-65 -60	WSW <sub>2</sub> SW <sub>3</sub>	52 57 63	Cloudy, some rain early; close and warm day, chiefly cloudy and little sun at times, black clouds and distant thunder all the even <sup>g</sup> ; and hard rain here from 7 1/2 pm, till near 9 pm. -		53
						Total rain 0.59

Extract from Whistlecraft's Weather Journal noting the death of his daughter Amelia Susan

## Conclusion

We can see from the foregoing that despite having been crippled by disease early in his life he managed to live a full and useful life. From the influence of his mother, he was given a middle-class education which equipped him to write books and newspaper articles. Attending the Ipswich Mechanics Institute sparked his interest in science, meteorology and nature. His

background in farming allowed him to write in a way that farmers and rural gentry could appreciate. His writing was well appreciated and missed when he died.

The rural decline from 1870 onwards probably meant that his almanacs did not sell as well and his shop did not do as much business, which led to poverty in his old age. However, they must have managed to hold their head above water since they do not seem to have had to go into the workhouse.

Despite collecting and analysing a great volume of weather data, he does not seem to have been able to advance the science of meteorology. We now know why this is so difficult. A lot of the dynamics of weather and the ability to predict it is dependent on observations on a large scale. Fitzroy with his Meteorological Department could get weather reports from stations across the country via telegraph which allowed him to start to produce more accurate short-term forecasts. A lot of the ideas that enabled the understanding and prediction of weather were not elaborated until the early twentieth century and even the jet stream was not identified until after the Second World War.

Despite this, Whistlecraft is still remembered with affection in Suffolk.

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