

SOME GLIMPSIES OF PARISH LIFE, 1921/24

by

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Browsing through some old papers in the attic of my childhood home, Broyleside Farm, I came upon two pages of the Ringmer Parish Magazine, from October 1921 and April 1924. The reason for their preservation by my parents was not hard to find, for they contained the notices of the baptism at Ringmer Parish Church of their two baby daughters, Audrey May and Gertrude Winifred.

In 1921 Charles Edward Carey, and Ada Annie, his bride from North Wales, were living in the house now known as 'Old Farmhouse' in Broyle Lane, but at that time it was a working farmhouse adjoining the farmyard which is now a play area for the children of Broyle Lane. With the birth of his first daughter there were four generations of his family living and farming in the lane, and there were two earlier generations buried in Ringmer Churchyard, beside the lych-gate.

The two pages reveal fascinating glimpses of parish life in Ringmer sixty years ago. Although the population was only half that of 1982, the pages show that Ringmer must have been a lively, active village then as it is now. Indeed, many of the reports and views could apply very easily to the present day - well attended Easter Services in a prettily decorated church, with hearty singing and a choir to sing an anthem; an interest in missionary work (the scope has narrowed in 1982); local history considered important enough to be included in the Vicar's letter, and church history. I wonder how many parishioners of 1921 followed Mr. Pink's advice on obtaining the best view of the east window! The Free Will Offering perhaps indicates a 1920s equivalent of the present day Stewardship Campaign. If he could be here to-day the Rev. Leefe would be gratified to know that it is still "evident the good old Sussex game (of stoolball) is not on the wane in Ringmer" and to see it being played on the village green, as it was then no doubt. He would also be pleased to see the present strength of the Guide and Scout movement but a little sad perhaps to see the decline in numbers of the Mothers' Union.

The Rev. George Robson Leefe became Vicar of Ringmer in 1916. From what I have heard my mother say, he was loved by his parishioners, and certainly his letters begin and end in a caring manner. Most of the reports in these pages of the magazine contain references to the Vicar or to his hospitality at the Vicarage, and indicate that the Church was to the fore in parish matters. There is no means of knowing how many pages there were to each copy, but the magazine was

apparently issued bi-monthly, and by their layout and the tearing line each page would appear to be one of a double sheet. Or it could have been a single sheet within a cover containing details of church services and parish officials. If there were more pages, perhaps they contained details of other village activities such as sporting events (there was an active cricket club in the 1920s I believe), whist drives, dances, etc. It is impossible to say, unless one of our Ringmer octogenarians reading this can recall something to provide a clue. Was there an editor, or was this task undertaken by the Vicar? It is tantalising to think we may never know.

There is a glimpse in these pages of the people who were influential in parish affairs in the early 1920s. Most of the names are no longer familiar in Ringmer, their owners having died or moved from the village, but there are one or two old Ringmer names, such as Turner, Paris and Foord, and the more unusual, but no less well known, Southerden and Lawford. The people who made up the Parochial Church Council, however, were well known in 1924. To mention a few:- Mr. and Mrs. Wilmshurst kept the village Post Office and Stores; Mr. R. Childs was butler to Mr. John Christie of Glyndebourne, and a member of the church choir; Mr. Gurr was Headmaster of Ringmer School and Miss Bridge infants teacher; Mr. and Mrs. Kinnaird of 'Old Cottage'; Mrs. Fenner of 'Ashtonville', who was my music teacher in 1932; Mrs. Spencer of Delves House, who is buried at the junction of the paths behind the church in Ringmer Churchyard; and no less than four members of the Kibbler family, who lived at 'Ashcroft'. Mrs. Treherne, whose name is mentioned in the Churchyard Fund list of subscribers, lived at 'Merton Cottage' and there is a family grave just behind the wall to the east of the lych-gate - it is easily recognisable by the miniature hedge growing round it.

Another tombstone is also connected with these pages. It is in memory of the Mrs. Hines who is remembered with affection in 1924, and is situated just in front of the tower on the west side of the church porch.

My favourite item from this picture of Ringmer in 1924 is the one headed 'The Nursing Association'. This association was a voluntary body and its purpose was to provide the village with a District Nurse in the days when there was no Health Service as we know it today. I believe the subscription to the scheme was one shilling a year per household. Did Nurse Jenkins get her motor cycle? Ringmer being the village it is, I have no doubt that she did.

This same Nurse Jenkins was responsible for the safe delivery of the two baby girls whose baptisms are recorded at the beginning of these pages, and she was probably still travelling on her 'push-bike', as pedal cycles were called by

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the country folk. Nurse Jenkins was held in affection by my mother and indeed it was she who helped to choose my name from the birth columns of a well known daily paper.

And so let us end our glimpses of Ringmer life sixty years ago with one of Nurse cycling through the quiet village, past the new War Memorial and the Parish Room, the Green where cattle grazed round the pond at the North Road end, past Hooper's the butchers and Geering's bakery, Goldsmith's shop and the village pump, Allcorn's the Grocer (now Amoco), The Brewers Arms (now Tilbury's), Chestnut Cottages, Elm Court (Ringmer Hotel) and the Council School, to Broyle Lane. The high hedges and the cool grass verges of the lane must have provided welcome shade from the hot sun, for there was a late summer heatwave on September 26th 1921. Perhaps she was already dreaming of a less arduous form of transport as she pedalled along to the Old Farmhouse and the room on the extreme front right under the steep roof to attend the birth of the sixth generation of the Carey family in Ringmer.