

Reepham 1935–45

Margaret Rowe (who now lives in Norwich) was born in the Reepham and Whitwell Rectory in May 1935. She has given the following vivid memories of her early years spent in Reepham.

My father, the late Rev. Bernard Porter Luscombe, came to the living of Whitwell and Kerdiston in 1932 and when the Rev. Moore retired a few months afterwards he also became rector of Reepham and Hackford. I still visit Mrs Moore (94 years old in April) in Aysgarth, Wensleydale, whenever I am in Yorkshire.

As my father was a very talented and enthusiastic musician, many of my most vivid memories are connected with music. From the age of two onwards I was to sing contralto in the church choir. I could sing long before I could read. I would sit next to Mrs Jean Hawes and as a child I never understood why Mrs Hawes and my mother (another contralto) had larger and more comfortable hassocks than the rest of us. On cold Sunday evenings we sat in the choir stalls clutching hot-water bottles!

Before Evensong on warm summer Sundays we were sometimes allowed to climb to the top of St Michael's tower and sing anthems, unaccompanied and to the delight of many listeners who collected below.

Although I was unable to reach the pedals, I had my first taste of playing the organ at a children's service in St Mary's – I seem to remember "All Things Bright and Beautiful" had far too many verses.

When playing the Harrison & Harrison Organ (now moved from St Michael's into St Mary's) at the September Flower Festival in 1989 many happy memories were recalled. I remember in particular dear old Mr Fenn who pumped the organ (without complaint) for Mrs Gibbs, Bessie Jewell, my sister Pat and me.

At children's services I occasionally had to read a lesson and I stood on a specially made box so that I could reach and see the Bible. There were also splendid parade services with Scouts, Cubs, Guides and Brownies. My father, being a military man, insisted that rehearsals for the colour parties were to be taken very seriously; any objectors were speedily replaced.

I was fortunate to attend Reepham School until I was ten years old, being extremely well taught by Mrs Bird, Mrs Lawn and Miss Maude Bradfield (or Braddie as I knew her). During the war Miss Bradfield came to live with us at the rectory – as did a number of evacuees. Army officers were billeted with us and church army captains who helped run the parish whilst my father was away in the army. He was in France, at Dunkirk and was also stationed at Aldershot and later, after a compassionate posting, at Nelson and Britannia Barracks in Norwich.

Margaret Rowe

Memories of music in Reepham during the Second World War

The previous article was contributed by Margaret Rowe and the following has been sent by her sister, Mrs Pat Swinhoe-Phelan née Luscombe.

Much of the church music continued as before the war as various organists helped out when the regular organist, Bessie Jewell, joined the WRNS [Women's Royal Naval Service], although she played whenever she came home on leave. Whilst she was away, she was ably deputised by Miss Bartle, who would cycle all the way from Kerdiston, by Mrs Gibbs or by myself.

My memories are mostly about playing for Evensong during the dark winter evenings. The back of St Michael's under the gallery was "blacked out" and a frame put around the organ up in the gallery. Mr Fenn had to manage to blow the organ in the semi-darkness but he never let us down. Inside the frame was rather claustrophobic and hearing what was going on downstairs presented some difficulty. However we mostly had the hymns with organ and congregation together, but the psalms were another matter, the responses were very "hit and miss" but we got through and Evensong continued right through the war.

Band concerts were the high spot during the war with frequent concerts in the old band hall, which was situated on the site opposite Abbs Garage and now occupied by the "impressive" builder's workshop of Mr Prince. The late Queen Mary honoured the band with her presence on one occasion. She arrived from Sandringham in one of the old, very upright Rolls-Royce cars and very obviously enjoyed the concert as she tapped away with her feet and her parasol. Afterwards she met many of the band.

Recital concerts were held but not very frequently, the Rev. Luscombe sang such songs as "When the Sergeant Major's on Parade" and "On the Road to Mandalay" and Gilbert and Sullivan solos. He sometimes played the cello and I accompanied him. Our favourite, and of the audience, was always Saint-Saëns' "The Swan".

Another excitement was the visit of "The Norfolk Turkey's Concert Party". They came several times and their cast included a brilliant blind pianist, Alan Paul, and Griffith Jones, the actor and film star. They would perform short sketches as well as popular musical numbers.

Pat Swinhoe-Phelan née Luscombe

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