

William Alfred Pask – Tailor

‘Reepham tailor working at 91’; ‘50th anniversary of third wedding’. These were the local headlines which people read in the newspapers of January 4th 1943. A little under four months later on 1st May, the same papers were recording a death the previous day of William Alfred Pask – Tailor of Reepham for more than 80 years.

The early years

Not a lot is known about the early years of ‘Billy’ Pask’s life. He was born in Ipswich to a travelling man, also called William Alfred, and his Reepham-born wife [was] Charlotte, nee Loades. The next time we find his family is in Norwich, where his only brother Charles Alfred was born in 1853. Only one year after this his mother Charlotte dies in Ipswich of cholera, aged just 24. What happens next is a mystery, but it seems that William and his baby brother Charles were taken to the ‘Loades’ grandparents in Reepham to be brought up, and this is where the Reepham Pask dynasty begins.

The working years

Billy used to tell his grandchildren that his first ever job was scaring crows for a farmer. However, going back to the newspaper articles of January 1943, we learn that he first entered tailoring at the age of seven, and at the age of 10 became apprenticed to the Reepham firm of Bircham and Amos. In 1875, possibly with money received from the estate of his late grandmother, he set out in business on his own, and built up a very high-class tailoring business with wealthy customers in many parts of the country.

The family man

William was no stranger to tragedy, having lost his mother at three years old and seemingly being deserted by his Dad soon after. However, sorrow continued with him for many years to come. He first wife Elizabeth [Ellis] died of TB aged 36, just three days after the death of their youngest son Donald, leaving William with eight small children to cope with. Such was the scale of these events that a ‘fund’ was set up in the village to support him through these dark days. However, more grief was to come, on 30 September 1890 he was married to Clara [Elizabeth Neale], only to be widowed again for a second time a little over 3½ years in November 1891. Just nine months after this his ten-year-old daughter Ethel died in a tragic accident whilst out playing. However, after his third marriage in January 1893 to Annie [Sarah Rowe], things did begin to go better at least for a time. It is not perhaps surprising that at one stage William took to heavy drinking and his wife lived in fear of him coming home at night, but in his latter years he reformed after a ‘conversion experience’ at the Methodist Chapel. William was the father of 18 children, including one step-child

from his second wife. Of these 15 lived into adult life – eight boys and seven girls. From this family have come hundreds of descendants still living today in many parts of the world.

The William Alfred Pasks

William was very proud of his family, as he loved children, but he had a special pride in the four living generations of William Alfred and three known pictures were taken of them at stages in life. Few know that his father was also William Alfred, and with William Alfred V – still alive and well, living in Aylsham there has now been a William Alfred Pask for 166 years.

Author's Note: The preceding article is in no way a history of the Pask family, a book would be needed for that.

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