

Diary of a Country Clerk – Excerpt

In the January 1985 newsletter I included an article about Reepham in 1875 (taken from Kelly's Directory) and the second part of our three local churches, St. Mary's Church, Reepham. Shortly after the completion of the newsletter, I found in the library a small book entitled "Diary of a Country Clerk" by C.L.S. Linnell. It only amounts to eight or so pages and is obviously a small article (of interest to Reepham) taken from a larger volume. I assume this as the first page is numbered 413 and the last page 419.

The article commences with a reference to Parson Woodforde and talks of the complications in Reepham as there were two parishes in one small country town, the article then continues with items of interest taken from the Diary, Account and Commonplace Book of Mr. Watson, Clerk of the Parish of Reepham-cum-Kerdiston during the 1860s. The article gave some interesting detail which would have been ideal to produce in January linking it in with the other two mentioned items. However, Mr. Linnell's writing does offer some interesting detail and I include some notes about it; if it whets your appetite then you will have to get the book from the library to digest it more fully.

The particular point that I wish to comment on concerns the two churches; we are informed that they were complete with their own incumbents, curates, clerks and sextons and were interchangeable in all things except congregations. Apparently, the congregation were tenacious of their rights and loyalties to their own particular parish church. Music for the services was provided by choirs and village bands who would perform in the galleries of both churches (are there two galleries today!) and when a harmonium was first introduced into Reepham Church this was regarded by Mr. Watson as a "rather dangerous proceeding". He obviously disapproved of change and recorded the lack of enthusiasm when he was charged with distributing the first edition of "Hymns Ancient and Modern".

The Communion was celebrated about once a month, the number attending was never very impressive, even on Easter Day when never more than thirty are recorded during the ten years (1859-69) covered by the book. The attendance for other services was (by today's standard) phenomenal, between three and four hundred worshippers would attend, especially in the afternoon and evening. On every Good Friday there was a morning service with a congregation of over four hundred; this impressive figure is slightly misleading when we are told that farm labourers got a holiday on Good Friday, with pay provided they went to Church. It must be remembered that the figures given are for Reepham-cum-Kerdiston and doubtless they were much the same for Whitwell-cum-Hackford.

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