



NEWSLETTER NO. 100 DECEMBER, 2020

Corona Virus Edition No. 7



**MERRY CHRISTMAS AND
A HAPPY & HEALTHY NEW YEAR
TO OUR MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND VISITORS**

As residents in Tier 3 or Tier 2 our Christmas celebrations this year will be somewhat muted. Let's hope this newsletter brings some comfort and happy reading to you. Let's hope the new vaccine for Covid 19 does its work and enables us to resume normal activities in the coming year. However until the authorities give the all clear there will still be no meetings of the Society. As stated in the last three newsletters we propose to postpone annual membership renewal for 2020-21 until further notice.

SEASONAL SNIPPETS
Christmas Stories from Around the Harborough District

These are two contrasting accounts of Christmas in the Harborough district. The first dates from Victorian & Edwardian times and the second from the 1930s.

**CHRISTMAS IN HARBOROUGH IN
VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN TIMES**

By David Johnson

In 1885 the parishes of Market Harborough, Great Bowden and Little Bowden agreed to publish a joint magazine. Its monthly price was one penny. Over the next few

years the parish news from the three parishes gives us a glimpse of how Christmas was celebrated in the late Victorian and Edwardian period.

Most striking is the absence of any build-up to the festival in the preceding month. Christmas began with Christmas Eve and ended with the Feast of the Epiphany on January 6.

The churches had no Christmas services before Christmas Eve. Advent was observed as a time of penitence in its own right, with a course of sermons on Sunday and Wednesday evenings at St Dionysius. The Nine Lessons and Carols service had still to be invented. Advent carols, Christingle and Crib services were unimagined concepts. Local schools paid no attention to the approaching festival; the presentations they mounted in the week before Christmas were on unconnected themes such as Father Time and Queen Victoria's Golden Reign.



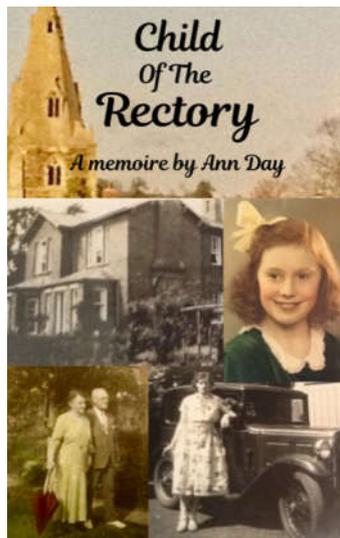
The churches were decorated a day or two beforehand. St Hugh's mission church held a service with carols on Christmas Eve. But there was no Midnight Mass, seen as far too Roman Catholic for the Church of England in the 1880s. Christmas Day itself was marked with the usual Sunday services – Holy Communion, Matins and Evensong. Three of the Christmas Day services at St Dionysius were fully choral. The choir sang an anthem at evensong and carols after the service. There were more carols after evensong on the Sunday after Christmas. And that was it – Christmas done and dusted.

In Great Bowden an annual tea and Christmas tree was given to the Sunday School children just before Christmas. But Boxing Day was the main day for entertainment, and the regular tea at Little Bowden was much anticipated. In 1889 it was followed by a performance of 'Pinafore' by Gilbert and Sullivan. At Great Bowden in 1889 the Christmas Day offerings were given to the choir fund; and the choir's efforts were rewarded with a 'treat' held on January 10.



In the town there was a limited amount of seasonal commercial activity. In the parish magazine Greens advertised Christmas cards, and the bigger shops sold seasonal fruits and goodies, or recommended appropriate items for presents. But the idea of special trading events like Late Night Shopping would have been alien. During the twelve days of Christmas there were events like the 'Sale of Work' in the Corn exchange on January 3 1885, which featured 'a large Christmas Tree, ornamented with fancy articles and toys'. In the evening there was entertainment from a 'troupe of amateur minstrels'. And by 1912 there was a January sale with substantial reductions all round at Shindler and Douglas, drapers of Market Harborough. Some things never change!

Christmas at Slawston Rectory by Ann Day



I remember my Christmases as a child in the 1930's. As a rule, extra cousins would visit at the rectory where mummy and I lived with my grandparents. I had been born in Ontario, Canada in 1927. I came to England when the depression began in 1930. Daddy could no longer provide for us and he needed to find reliable work. Mummy and I sailed to England to live in the Rectory. My grandfather was Reverend Charles Hanmer-Strudwick.

One Christmas my father sent me a present all the way from Canada! It was a baby doll with a Bakelite head. If ever I dropped it, which of course sometimes happened, the head would get little surface cracks. It had painted-on eyes and was dressed in a white and pink dress and bonnet. It lay on a pink satin pillow. I still think it is the most beautiful doll I've ever seen. Today I dress dolls for my great great grandchildren with that doll in mind.



Typical dolls of the 1920s and 1930s

Christmas at the Rectory was a gala time with all of the children in the village going door-to-door singing carols. This was one of the rare times when my cousins and myself were allowed to mix with the village children. For some old fashioned reason it just wasn't done for a child from the rectory to play with the village's children. When carolling, different homes would invite us in and we would be given biscuits.

On a nice moonlit night we'd all walk down the middle of the road singing Christmas songs. My grandfather always gave a Christmas party in the village hall for the children's choir. That party was a big thing for us children because nothing much ever happened in the village. Every child got a present from the money collected from the carol singing. As well, there was a dance party at a nearby village called Hallaton. It was three miles away from Slawston. With a group of teens to oversee us, we used to walk the three miles to Hallaton, all arm in arm. In later years during the war and the blackouts, nanny would also walk with us.



In my family, the grandchildren would hang their Christmas stocking up at the end of their beds on Christmas Eve. The next morning we would find them filled with sweets, 2 of 4 nuts, and oranges. There would also be a few little toys and always a

noise maker. We would then get dressed and go to church, where my grandfather would give Holy Communion. When we returned from church we had lunch. After lunch we were allowed to go into the drawing room where we all lined up facing the drawn blue curtains. When the curtains were opened we saw a beautifully decorated Christmas tree. Each year, the Christmas tree was a work of art created by mummy. At that time, in that part of England, you weren't allowed to cut down trees. Instead mummy would collect branches from the evergreen trees which lined the driveway. She used the same wooden pole each year and she nailed the evergreen branches on to the pole in such a way that it formed a proper Christmas tree. It had unlit Victorian candles clipped to it's branches. It was trimmed with tinsel and ornaments which were the same ones each year. I remember the little silver glass birds with the white bushy tails being clipped onto the tree. They broke very easily.



After we had opened our presents, the village children were allowed in to see the Rectory tree. If we were lucky, we were given two presents. It depended on the value of the gifts. I remember the year 1934. I had just turned seven and I received a Bagatelle game. It was a large wooden board with little nails sticking in it and small holes. You had to hit small metal balls with a stick. As the balls rolled around they would fall into the holes, each hole had a score written beside it. That was an expensive gift, so I only received one gift that year. However, from the money collected from Christmas carolling that year, the ladies of the village gave me a small doll at the village hall party. I remember it was a celluloid doll which had a hand knitted skirt and sweater. I loved that doll. I kept it in my bedroom until I was an adult.

I remember the grandeur of the house at Christmas. Mummy and nanny and, of course us children would have decorated the house the week before. We put holly across the top of all the pictures. We'd cut the holly from the bushes around the rectory, always being careful to cut the holly bushes so as not to leave any gaping holes.

We were allowed to sit with the grown-ups in the dining room to listen to the King's speech at 3 pm. We were allowed to take one toy in with us, but only on Christmas day, and we were not permitted to speak (children were to be seen and not heard). After the speech ended we went to the kitchen to be with nanny until it was time to be dressed up for Christmas dinner. This was one time of the year when nanny, who was also the maid, was expected to wear a pretty white apron and a white headband trimmed with eyelet lace. The rest of the year nanny wore a white starched apron and a white hat similar to a nurse's hat. That tradition was ended during the war years.

Mummy would wear a long, red gown, the same one every year. It was something left over from the twenties. It had a cut-out on each shoulder. As a child I would see her in that dress and think to myself that she was the most beautiful lady in the world. My grandfather would put on his best suit and my grandmother would wear her best lace gown. My grandmother wore all of her dresses down to the ground every day of the year. She was very old fashioned. She wore her hair close to her head in waves and a bun.

For Christmas, my cousins and myself would always put on our best clothes. I had a silky party dress. It was light green with little flowers in the print, with a full skirt, puffed sleeves, and a tiny lace collar. I wore that dress "for best" until I outgrew it. I felt like a princess with my shiny black shoes and long white socks. We were allowed to use the main staircase on Christmas. The little electric lights were turned on in the hallway only on Christmas night because of the price of electricity. All dressed up, we walked down the stairs into a brilliantly lit grand hall with none of the ghostly shadows which I saw for the rest of the year. Quietly, we all went into the dining room. Grandfather put the bottle of port wine on the hearth in front of the fireplace to warm it. The grown-ups would use it to toast King George at the end of the meal.

Grandmother would summon nanny who was also the maid to bring in the goose on a silver platter. Sometime during the war years people began cooking a turkey at Christmas instead of a goose. The large table was laid by mummy who would place a 4 of 4 wide red satin ribbon over the white linen tablecloth. She made it cross in the middle and hang over the table edges to make it look like a big Christmas present.

On this day the children were on their best behaviour. It was such a delight to be able to sit with the grownups at a beautiful table. We didn't make a sound other than when grandfather chose one of us to say the Grace in Latin. Nanny would serve everyone and then bring in the Christmas pudding. Grandfather would strike a match and light the pudding. It gave off a beautiful blue flame. Grandmother would cut the pudding. We also had a Christmas fruitcake that nanny and grandmother had made weeks ahead. It had a layer of almond marzipan and a layer of white royal icing. On top of the cake sat a porcelain robin on a log. We used the same robin every year. The children had a piece of cake and the grown-ups had the Christmas pudding with the rum in it. We sat and watched the grown-ups toast the King. After we all left the table, we went into the drawing room and had to sit silently while the grownups talked and laughed.

To me, at Christmastime the drawing room was my favourite room in the house because it had the beautifully decorated tree in it's bay window. I had to sit still and not talk unless I was spoken to. I didn't mind that, it was a wonderland of a day, and by that time I would be feeling quite tired. I was allowed to stay up until nine p.m. on December 25th. I do wish that my children could have experienced a Christmas at the Rectory from that era. They would have learned so much about the magic of Christmas. I have only wonderful memories of that time.

*** 'Oh Happy Day: These Times and Those Times' ***

by Carmen Callil

Don't forget to order a copy of 'Oh Happy Day' by one of our distinguished Harborough Historical Society members Carmen Callil. It will make an ideal Christmas gift.



A considerable section of the book relates to the lives of Carmen's ancestors who lived in Market Harborough and other parts of Leicestershire.

The book can be purchased from:

*** Quinn's Books (Chris):** Tel: 01858 – 432313, email:

info@quinnbooks.co.uk Website: via Facebook

*** Kibworth Books (Debbie):** Tel: 0116 – 2791121; Email:

info@kibworthbooks.com ; Website: kibworthbooks.com

NOTE

BOTH book shops will be dealing with orders during the lockdown. They will either send your book by post or arrange for it to be collected.

*** Harborough Museum – CLOSED for the Lock Down Period**

Tim Savage, the Local Museums Officer, has informed the Historical Society that The Harborough Museum will be closed as from Thursday 5th November until the Lock Down is lifted by the Government. Meanwhile you can visit the Museum website for local information at www.harboroughmuseum.org.uk

*** SECOND HAND BOOKS FOR SALE**

ATTACHED to this newsletter is a list of books on historical and historically related subjects. Some have already been sold from the original list. We are charging a small amount which will go towards the

Historical Society funds. If you are interested in buying a book(s) then you can either pick them up from me or I can deliver them to you. Could you please put the money in an envelope. Thank you.

Contact Len Holden

Tel: 01858 -446067 Email: leonard.holden@ntlworld.com

*** Harborough Historian Index Page**

Dudley Brown, the Harborough Historical Society Webmaster is daily adding links to the Harborough Historian index page of the website. This enables downloading or viewing of past articles. Link here

https://www.marketharboroughhistoricalsociety.org/body_historian_index.html

*** HARBOROUGH HISTORIAN ARTICLES**

A Full Index of articles in the Harborough Historian is now available via the link below:

www.marketharboroughhistoricalsociety.org/historian_index.html

*** Please visit our website www.marketharboroughhistoricalsociety.org**

For more information contact Len Holden on 01858 – 446067. Email leonard.holden@ntlworld.com
Market Harborough Historical Society was founded in 1931 and became a Registered Charity in 1984 and was re-registered in 2014 Charity No. 1157244