

November Meeting

In 1922, the Reverend Worthington Jukes, Rector of Shobrooke Church, printed 'A History of the Parish Church and Domesday Manors of Shobrooke', the result of the many years he had spent going through boxes of mouldering documents belonging to the church, and of his researches since his installation as Rector in 1890. Several editions were made and circulated, but over the years were lost and neglected. Recently, however, one of the surviving, fading copies owned by a parishioner, Mrs Seddon, has been retyped and reprinted by her son, Martin Seddon, and it is now available again. This stimulated a group of interested residents of Shobrooke to meet in the Red Lion from time to time, where they share their knowledge and record their memories.

We feel very fortunate that they came to our meeting on Thursday 14th November to present some of their parish history to us in a five part entertainment. Firstly we heard about the Rev Jukes' book itself, and how it is divided into a history of the church itself and the the families in the various manors and farms. We were told how the lost Holy Well was found by a dog, the discovery of part of the lost Preaching Cross and the many duties of the churchwardens in the nineteenth century, which included repairing bridges and making gunpowder. We heard how Mr Tuckfield, a poor weaver's son, found a crock of gold in Posbury and bought an estate (or so the story goes), and how the brother of Laurence Bodley paid for the restoration of the Bodleian library in Oxford in Tudor times.

The second part of the evening was a personal reminiscence of the village school from Jack Fey, born in 1929. He recalled the division between Girls and Boys, the primitive toilets and central stove where they ate their sandwiches, and the distance many of the children walked to school in hobnailed boots. He remembered the evacuees in the war doubling the school attendance, and how they all learned the anthems of different countries so well that he was able to sing us 'The Marseillaise', after over 70 years. The school is now demolished and housing has replaced it.

Next Len Darling, originally from Essex but now a long term resident of Shobrooke, told us about his researches into the people buried in the parish. There are over 360 tombstones, about 100 other inscriptions plus the war memorial, and he has recorded all the people and looked at the stories of many of them, including John Fey (Jack's father) who was sexton for 36 years. Len brought the old sexton's ladder which was going to be thrown away, but which he has restored, and which was used when the graves were being dug. John Fey was also a carpenter, who probably made the coffins, and was known for walking the lanes to collect moss with which to line the graves. Emma Fey (nee Luxton) came to Shobrooke via the workhouses of Leyton and Romford in Essex. Joyce Gibson Pender and Emma Alice Pender both came from Tresco on the Isles of Scilly and were related to the famous Gibson family who photographed and recorded all the wrecks on the islands. These were clearly only a fraction of the stories and detective work which Len has painstakingly done.

Rosemary Barber then read us out fascinating sections from the life of the Rev Worthington Jukes. Born in Canada in 1849 to a devout family, he was educated at Blundells in Tiverton. All his siblings were missionaries and he worked in Afghanistan for

27 years after his ordination at the age of 25. Conditions were clearly hard and dangerous; his two first children died of fever and his wife's health was not good. Eventually this caused the family to return to England where he became the Rector of Shobrooke and spent the rest of his life. However, he was a determined and colourful character and clearly not an easy person to deal with. There were constant clashes with his churchwardens. Both his remaining son and his son in law were killed in the First World War, and he died in Exmouth at the age of 88.

Finally we had a readings from the diary of John Sharland, miller, farmer and parish councillor in the late 19th and early 20th century. Phil Keen read and Jenny Irvine enacted the maidservant, in a series of entries describing illnesses, weddings, and funerals (two in Newton St Cyres) the Rev Worthington Jukes and his annoying habits, the Northern Lights, flood, fire and an eclipse of the sun, skating on Shobrooke Park lake and heavy snowfalls, the killing of a man by the fall of a cob wall, going by train to Exeter to watch a football match, and the work of running the mill and farming the land, shooting rabbits and rooks.

We were entertained and informed and most of all felt a direct contact with the individuals whose words were spoken from diaries and writings and about whose lives we were told. The small parish of Shobrooke had contacts spreading over England to Europe and the Middle East, and so although the presentation was a snapshot of a time in a Devon parish, it related to the wider world.