

Christmas in the Village

Trimley St. Martin



Christmas lights along Grimston Lane, December 2018

Over the last week I have taken the opportunity to reflect upon some of the things we associate with Christmas but in the context of Trimley St. Martin. The Lights, Christmas Trees, Carols, Gifts, Father Christmas, Cards and letters, Turkeys, the Ghost of Christmas Past and the Church are all present in our Village as are the good spirits and humour of its residents. I take this opportunity to thank all my Interviewees for their support and all my readers for their engagement with this Blog. You are the people who make this Project work.

Lights

During the scorching months of this last summer, I was frequently up with the dawn, if not before. Together with my former next door neighbour, Kitty, I developed the habit of following one of the many walks to the river as the sun came up. It was easily the best part of the day, and other than one or two encounters with dog walkers, it was mostly spent in our own company. As the days grew shorter and less clement neither of us sustained the early awakening and with the advent of Autumn and its later sunrises, our peaceful walks came to a halt. Now we have reached the darkest time of the year, there is no immediate or obvious encouragement to step out at 6.00 a.m. into a black morning laced with biting winds and horizontal rain. Instead I have transferred my circuits to the other end of the day and re-discovered the softer pleasures of night walking. The field and woodland walks remain remote to me during the dark hours but with street pavements lit by diffused lights shining out from windows and gardens, the anonymity of the spangled night has a charm all of its own at this time of year. There are

no more people evident than there were during the bright days of Summer but their contribution to the Christmas season is now visibly pre-eminent.

The streets in St. Martin's may be limited in number but the effort people have expended into illuminating the dark hours of December are impressive. They include vibrant Yuletide dioramas, Christmas trees shyly peeping out from behind half drawn curtains, porches garlanded with lights and wreathes and possibly finest of all, the floating, celestial lights emanating from Grimston Lane, visible across the large field opposite 'The Hand in Hand'. Accompanied by the faintest hint of wood smoke, there is pleasure in a walk with the prospect of returning to a glowing stove and a warm drink.

Christmas Trees and Carols

The first night time harbinger of Christmas arrived on Tuesday 4th December at 6.00 p.m. outside the Memorial Hall. A small but not inconsiderable band of people, gathered around the entrance waiting for the first Father Christmas of the Year to appear. He walked out of the Hall with some diffidence; we must assume the Sledge was parked elsewhere or was otherwise invisible. After a cry of five, four, three, two, one ... the lights were switched on as if by magic and it all became official. Christmas had started. We were shepherded inside where soup and bread were on offer and the SAINTS players were clearing their collective throats in preparation for a spirited performance of the first Carols of the year. We all joined in with 'Ding Dong Merrily on High' and then moved on to fancier vocal work in subsequent carols where alternate verses were sung by different sections of the audience. Carols were followed by the first appearance of Father Christmas, who sat in his Grotto dispensing good will and gifts for the children. Additional kindnesses flowed from the kitchen as soup and bread appeared and all in all a happy time was had by all.



Father Christmas in the Memorial Hall Grotto, 4th December 2018



The 2018 Christmas Tree outside the Memorial Hall.



Kitty Smith, on the left, in the Memorial Hall Kitchen.

Gifts

One of my happiest memories of Trimley at Christmas time was going to the Christmas Bazaars, or Sales of Works in the mid 1960s. I think these must have been organised by the W.I. although please correct me if I am wrong. To my mind, there are few events more exciting. My memories may be skewed but are full of crochet and knitted items, delicious cakes and jewel like jams and jellies

presented in munificent abundance. I don't recall seeing such an event for many years but again, do correct me and tell me such happy events still occur. The closest I came to one this year was the weekend of the 7th, 8th and 9th of December when Goslings Farm Shop held a three day Craft Fair. The first day, Friday, was almost rained out but by Sunday all the stalls were present and people pored over the varied gifts on offer. This is the stuff to make my heart go zing.



The Craft Fair at Goslings Farm Shop, 9th December 2018



Father Christmas

The Farm Shop subsequently provided further opportunities to meet Father Christmas again for four consecutive Afternoon Teas. I walked to the Farm Shop on December 17th in the hope of a quick interview with this venerable old gentleman. As I approached Goslings, I could see the Landing Lights were switched on ready to guide his Sleigh in to a safe and invisible parking area. And as I entered the Shop, there He was in all His scarlet splendour. He was still wearing his driving goggles and it was not long before he joined by his personal Elfin Helper, who was full of bounce and good cheer. The busyness of the season was such, his googles had misted over.



Goslings Farm Shop, December 2018



Father Christmas at Goslings with mist in his eyes, December 17th 2018



Beth Piper, the Helpful Elf at Goslings, 17th December 2018

Christmas Cards and Correspondence

I asked a few of the people I interviewed this year to give me a Christmas memory in one or two sentences and they were kind enough to indulge me.

Gary the Postie, laughed when I asked him and gave me a knowing looking because this is the busiest time of year for Postmen everywhere. But when he stopped he told me,

"What I like is the fact there is still community feeling in the village, especially if you go down Old Kirton Road, where people have put up loads of decorations. And there is one house at the far side of Grimston Lane which just glows with lights."

Kitty Moss, who has only just departed St. Martin's and is still very much in my thoughts said,

"I can remember one year in the Post Office when my mother came to stay. She wasn't an early riser but we had to be as the customers would be queueing outside for pensions and food. There was one morning, when I had to manage her sudden appearance in her night clothes to prevent the public from seeing everything!"

Morag Liffen replied,

"I have fond memories of tramping across the fields opposite the Hand in Hand to go to Great Street Farm to feed the horses, after a booze laden Christmas lunch, leaving the grannies at home listening to the Queens speech. Great way to walk off those excess calories and alcohol. Happy Christmas!"

Yvonne Smart surprised me with her response,

"Christmas in Trimley St Martin has meant enjoying a picnic lunch somewhere. With the Deben and Orwell rivers on our doorstep there is always somewhere to go. And come rain or shine, long may we continue to enjoy such pleasures."

Such a wonderful idea for an alternative Boxing Day lunch.

Robin Biddle came up trumps with his offering of some 70 year old Christmas Cards. I reproduce just three here but they are simple, joyous offerings full of charm and topicality.



Christmas Cards from the collection of Robin Biddle





And finally, from Kate Todd, Trimley St. Martin's School Manager,

"I have many fond memories working at Trimley ST Martin Primary School at Christmas listening to the carol service practice through to the KS1 Production of the Nativity! You know as soon as these events occur you are speedily heading towards the end of term. This has to be the most exhausting but enjoyable term for me."

Children

Kate's focus on the children's experience led me to re-examine the School Log Books from the first part of the twentieth Century. I didn't expect to find much because these documents are entertainment light and business heavy but one or two entries suggest somethings never alter, namely illness at Christmas and the necessity for entertainment; parents may empathise. On 18th January 1904, the final entry for the year says,

"This week's attendances lower than last, about 30 children being absent from Whooping Cough and Influenza. Only 68 children in Attendance out of 109 on the books...Reverend Catlow has visited the school several times during this week. Xmas vacation starts."

And on December 19th 1919, the final entry states,

"School closed today for the Xmas Vacation. The Elder children gave an entertainment yesterday to the Junior Boys and Girls."

Perhaps the one I find most heartening is that of December 7th 1932. I don't suppose the school was thinking of Christmas but would hope it was considering seasonal pleasures for the children,

"Received parcel of Juvenile Library books from the County Librarian."

And finally, the Ghost of Christmas past... 1821 ... Turkeys

"If you can get me one large Turkey next week I shall prefer it to two smaller ones - but I do not mean an old Bird - and send it in a frail basket, for a hamper makes them charge for two more (rather) than for weight ..."

Letter from George Nassau, 8 Carlton Terrace, London to Mr. Wenn, Attorney at Law, Ipswich.

Reading the letters of the Honourable George Nassau, Lord of the Manors of Walton with Trimley, Felixstowe Priory, Grimston with Morston, Russells in Falkenham, Stratton with Seabridge and Blowfield with Burnevilles has thrown up many small curious asides amidst the routine quasi legal letters he wrote to his Attorneys. The request for the despatch of one large Turkey to himself was written from Nassau's London house, 8 Carlton Terrace to his Attorney at Law, Mr. Wenn on the 17th December 1821 and his request for such a bird raises the question of where the Turkey was to be obtained from and why Nassau didn't use Smithfield Market, a far closer provider of meat and poultry. Speculatively, I query whether his preference was based upon the livestock availability from one of his manors, or maybe, he just preferred his fowls to have a Suffolk origin. One aspect of the extract from Nassau's letter which may puzzle you is his request for the use of a 'frail' basket. Should you research the word in The Oxford English Dictionary, you will find it defined as a type of basket made of rushes, in appearance not dissimilar to a French Market Basket.



A modern 'frail' or basket made of rushes.

Mrs. Isabella Beeton in her 1861 'Book of Household Management' describes a Turkey as:

"A noble bird is a Turkey, roast or boiled. A Christmas dinner with the middle classes of the Empire would scarcely be a Christmas Dinner without its Turkey."

This was forty years after Mr. Nassau asked his Solicitor to send one from Suffolk, suggesting a far wider availability than in 1821. Such were the proclivities of our former Lord of the Manor, someone who could afford his Turkey to be despatched to him by none other than his Solicitor; not something any of us would consider suggesting to our own Legal Advisers today, if indeed, we have one. Whatever the source of his Turkey it assuredly came from Suffolk. Mr. Nassau was a gourmet demanding only the best from his own acreage and not any old bird to boot; he wanted a Suffolk Turkey. Such noble fare would probably have been beyond the reach of the agricultural workers and labourers of the day due to the post Napoleonic Wars farming depression. November and December 1821 were notably mild and exceptionally wet and times were hard for the workers.

Church

There have been many changes in two hundred years and with the possible exception of the Turkey, all the events recorded above were not taking place two hundred years ago. There has only been one constant; the Church Service on Christmas Day. This is probably the shared experience of most of us over the centuries and this year will be no different. Below you may see the times of Services over the Christmas period:

St Martin's & St Mary's Trimley

Friday 7th December
7.30pm Salvation Army Carol Concert

Sunday 16th December
10.30am Family Carols
6.30pm Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 23rd December
10.30am Holy Communion

Monday 24th December
3.30pm Crib Service
5.00pm Crib Service
11.30pm Midnight Communion

Tuesday 25th December
10.30am Family Communion

Sunday 30th January 2019
10.30am Holy Communion

"The Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth." John 1:14

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St Mary's website:
www.stmaryswalton.org.uk

St Martin's website:
www.stmartintrimley.org.uk
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I wish you all a Merry Christmas and Peaceful New Year.

If you have any comments or would like to be part of this Trimley St. Martin project, please contact me at:

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LR 21/12/2018