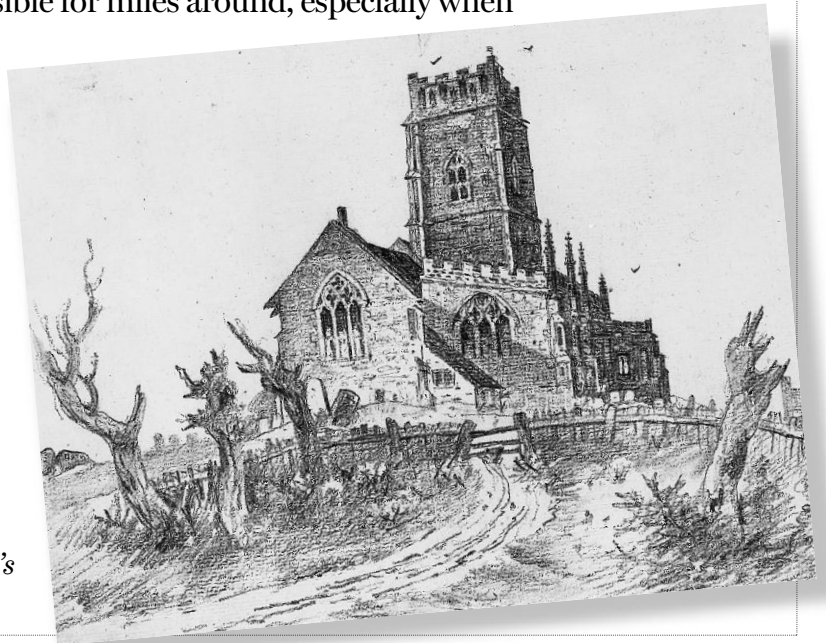


# “...A Christian Presence”

## CHAPTER 3. THE CHURCH & ITS INFLUENCES

**S**T MARY'S CHURCH STANDS DRAMATICALLY ON TOP OF THE STEEP HILL AT the south end of Kersey village. † Visible for miles around, especially when floodlit, it has conceivably been more photographed than any English church because Kersey is reputed to be the most photographed village in England! † Certainly, the church visitors' book is full of comments from people of every conceivable nationality on the beauty of the village and the serenity of the church.

*'Kersey Church, Suffolk,'  
pencil drawing of the  
East view, by George Frost  
(1734-1821) from a Sotheby's  
catalogue, Nov 1992*



**A** short history of the building, the oldest part of which dates back to the twelfth century, is given on an information sheet on sale in the church.

**In this chapter, we are concerned less with the fabric and more with the life of the church, its clergy and parishioners, as remembered and up to the present day. We get a picture of strict discipline regarding attendance at services and Sunday school which prevailed, in some families, up until the 1960's.**

**It must be appreciated that there was less to do on Sundays. With little money, fewer cars and – in earlier days – no television to divert them, for many people Sunday became synonymous with church, chapel or both.**

**Some remember going to the chapel in central Kersey (now “Chapel House”), and quite a few used to attend the small non-conformist chapel which stands on the western outskirts of the village, and only closed in the mid 1990's.**

**Today the congregation is smaller but, with more and more young families coming into the village, there is every chance of it growing. In any case the church has a prime position in Kersey, and not only geographically. The present vicar, Ian Wilson, expands on the subject:–**

**Rev. Ian Wilson:** I know clergy who would like my job because it's Kersey and they'd like to lead worship in this church. We plan to put the church onto a website on the Internet because we have so many people from abroad coming to visit! I went into church here this morning and thought, “It's so nice to be back!” It's just lovely to be here. There's something very special about Kersey. I think it's centuries of prayer. It has had a Christian presence on that hill for many centuries and people continually praying in the church – and whether there are two or twenty-five it matters not because that prayer is ongoing.



**Ruth Glead:** My mother was a wonderful mother, she really was – a real Christian. She'd been very high church for years. You daren't take anything to eat before you took communion every Sunday and, of course, we had to go to Sunday school whether we liked it or not. I've written this little poem about that:

SUNDAY SCHOOL IN 1920 BY RUTH GLEED

*When I was a little girl I went to Sunday school  
Of course in my early days that really was the rule.  
You had to wear your Sunday best and  
a hat put on your head  
I wished I'd had the chickenpox so I could  
stay in bed!*



*Ian Wilson after abseiling down Kersey Church Tower for Church funds in May 1994. His daughter Rebecca is with him*

*The church was cold the chairs were hard, why  
did I have to come?  
I sat there bored, I really did, and often sucked  
my thumb.  
The parson's wife she called to me, "What are  
you doing girl?"  
She didn't really understand my head was in  
a whirl.  
The Litany kept on and on, whenever would it stop?  
My mind wandered far away to Miss King's  
sweet shop.  
The Collect that we learned last night and  
said again today,  
The Septuagesima, the Quinquagesima –  
whatever do they mean?  
The organ was quite good though, we were  
allowed to sing  
And raise our little voices as if on angels' wings.  
The man who pumped the organ, which he  
had to do by hand,  
No electric in those days, I'm sure you  
understand –  
One day the poor man went to sleep, which  
made him look a fool  
When the organist jumped out at him and  
pushed him off his stool:*

*“If you don’t pump that organ so I can get a tune  
You’ll lose your job my man and that will be  
quite soon.”*

*Us little children tried to laugh, or at least to grin,  
But we were told to laugh in church on Sundays  
was an awful sin.*

*We kept our lips shut tightly, which was very  
hard I’m sure,*

*But we laughed our heads off once outside that  
old church door!*

*Oh I wish I was a little girl in Sunday school today  
With lots of paints and crayons and lovely  
games to play.*

*They seem to have such happy times, the  
teachers are so kind,*

*I’m glad they have a better time than I have  
left behind.*

*Sundays are so different as they are now and then –  
One thing I do remember, though, and that  
was to say AMEN*



**Verena Manning:** Ruby Glead’s dad always used to pump the organ in the services. We always went to church because my dad was sexton and gravedigger. We went to Sunday school and we didn’t come home, we marched straight over

from Sunday school to church. Where those gratings are in the church floor there were fires lit underneath and, in the corner of the belfry, there used to be a little stove which was lit and that would help these draw. Dad used to get up early on a Sunday morning to stoke those fires up and then he used to make them up again at about half past three in the afternoon for the evening service. And the church was always beautifully warm. But then, over the years, things altered and I suppose people wanted more money for looking after the fires. and that was hard work, and so was digging a grave. My dad’s graves never used to sink! Well you see, they were all done by hand – he used to dig them out and fill them in. And then he used to make the mound and turf it all you know. Then some people’s he used to look after through the year and their relations would pay him round about Boxing Day. He’d cut the graves through the year and bring the little round irons, which most people had in those days instead of headstones, home to paint.



**Owen Gillingwater:** I went to Sunday School for a while but not to church as such. For one thing I always had an aversion to organ music. And – if I may say so – the sermons in those days were boring. By the time my children went to Sunday school the parsons had got the idea of talking to the children, you see, but in my day they would go on about

some text way above our heads and we were bored to tears!



**Ray Goymour:** My dad's father wasn't a butcher, he was a gardener at the vicarage. He died in 1928, he was only 72. And his wife died with the shock within a week. Hence the epitaph on their gravestone – "Lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided." That's from Samuel isn't it? That must have come from Rev. Ambrose – to have that put on a stone in 1928! So you'll make sure I get buried here will you? Because I've got no close relatives – only cousins.

I've always gone to church up here since I was christened. Mother went up to be "churched" after I was born, as they used to be then to give thanks for safe childbirth. There wouldn't be a congregation there – that was done individually between the mother and the parson. Like christenings – they were just for the family.



**Mary Holden:** We always had a private christening in the afternoon not like they do now in the morning service. Mind you, we had our own vicar just doing this parish where as the vicars today have three or four parishes don't they?



**"MOTHER  
WENT UP TO  
BE 'CHURCHED'  
AFTER I WAS  
BORN, AS  
THEY USED TO  
BE THEN, TO  
GIVE THANKS  
FOR SAFE  
CHILDBIRTH."**

*Ray Goymour*

entirely different. Ever since mother died I've seldom missed a Sunday I think.

Ambrose is the vicar who stands in my mind – his grave is just between my grandparents' and parents'. He was a proper Parson – we only have a Priest in Charge now looking after three parishes, soon to be five. You couldn't move a Parson, but a Priest in Charge has got to go where he's told. Ambrose used to come into the school once a week or fortnight to read the register.



**Irene Hasler:** Even before I moved to Kersey, I knew Reverend Ambrose's daughter. He was very much loved,

though he and his wife were strict. Before I came to live here I went to tea with them one Sunday, and mentioned I'd like to go to Evensong. "You will wear long sleeves, dear, won't you," Mrs Ambrose said, "and a hat!"



**Mary Holden:** I remember Sunday school. We had to go in the school to start off and then we had to go into the church. We always had to learn one verse of a hymn and when we got up into Rev. Ambrose's class we had to learn the Collect every week. I never minded going but there was a lot didn't. Perhaps the parents didn't wish them to go, but there were several of us who went. My brother Harold used to come with me but he didn't like it very much. We all used to sit down the left hand side with Mrs Ambrose while the vicar was doing the service. And if you moved an eyelid she'd poke you in the back. You daren't move! They were very nice and they were here several years, but they were strict.



**Ted Martin:** I was in the church choir for a fortnight! The Reverend Ambrose was the parson then and one Sunday evening, about the second or third time, I'd got some sweets and I pulled a sweet out, and he saw me. He never done nothing while the service was on but when the service was over he said, "I want to speak to you in the vestry." And he

**"THE VICAR  
WAS REV.  
TEMPEST.  
HIS SISTER  
MARGARET  
WAS THE  
ILLUSTRATOR  
OF THE  
'LITTLE GREY  
RABBIT'  
BOOKS"**

*Owen Gillingwater*

really dressed me down. He said, "Don't you let that occur again. I will not having you eating sweets during the service." I didn't make no more ado – "Alright sir." I went out of the church and home and I said to my mother and father, "I ain't going no more." They wanted to know why and I told them and my mother said, "Well, if he don't want to go you can't make him." And that was the finish of my choir!



**Claude Munson:** We had to be in the church choir – Ambrose was the parson and he was strict! There was choir practice Friday night, and we had to go to church twice on a Sunday, eleven o'clock in the morning and six o'clock at night. Mary Seggar was in the choir and Ted Martin for a while – we was all in it. We had to have discipline, and it was the same with food – everyone in the family had the same food and you had to eat it! But there was no vandalism then, and no swearing.



**Cherry Chalmers:** Mabel Vince lived next door to mum

on The Green. There was Mabel Vince – she was religious – and a Mrs Allen, and we used to go to Mabel’s and have bible classes in her front room. I weren’t very old and we used to go for a laugh to be honest. Someone’d say, “We’re going to Mabel’s tonight!” and she’d have an oil lamp in the middle of the table and we used to kind of hide up, boys and girls! We used to go for fun, you know. She was a dear soul really and she’d play this harmonium what she used to have to pedal and we used to like it. Mary (Cherry’s cousin) used to come.



**Owen Gillingwater:** From 1936 to 1942 the vicar was Rev. Tempest. His sister Margaret was the illustrator of the “Little Grey Rabbit” books. She eventually became Lady Mears and lived in Ipswich with her husband. Rev. Tempest was a bachelor and he and his man servant used to run the equivalent of a Youth Club which was held in the vicarage on Friday nights. The older boys used to go. They had a great big handcart on which they used to put a tent and they would go away for the odd night and have a singsong all in the good Christian spirit. And we, the younger ones, used to go up to the vicarage and have some nice hot drinking chocolate! Rev. Tempest moved on from here to Aldeburgh.



**Leslie Cockayne used to write about people and events in the village, and would let Michael Harbinson, as one of the Kersey Newsletter editors, consider his work for inclusion. (Leslie’s memories of post World War 2 Kersey cricket matches were published in the October and November 1991 Newsletters and extracts from these are included in my chapter 9.) The following extracts from Leslie’s musings about the Reverend Tempest were not published in the Newsletter, but Michael Harbinson has agreed that I can use them here:**



**Leslie Cockayne:** “A dilemma confronted Roger Ernest Tempest when in 1936 he arrived in Kersey, to take up his ministry ... he was a bachelor, and so the course of employing an affordable girl to live in as housekeeper was not open to him ... The solution was a manservant, but soon after the fellow’s instatement, news reached Reverend Tempest of his delinquency with a girl from a nearby village ... furthermore, following the too easy relationship which had developed between master and man, it was possible that the Reverend’s car – one of only three in the village and instantly recognisable – could have been used for these nocturnal adventures. It was very awkward. The man must go, but how to tell him?”

... After a night of tossing and turning Tempest rose,

bowed his head and bent his knees ... then swiftly accomplished his ablutions, dressed and went to his study with every detail of the coming confrontation decided. What mattered it if the fellow took with him certain shirts he had noticed to be late in their laundry cycle? The man would be out of the house as soon as he could pack.

And so he was. Wages were made up ... and his thirty mile fare paid in advance. As for the man – he had the adaptability common to his kind. Two courses presented themselves. The clerical collar he had hastily packed with his own would come in handy as a prop for Saturday night pub performances in Bungay, Beccles or Bury St Edmunds ... or he could join the Spanish civil war on either side. If even King Edward VIII could err why should not he? ...”



**Grace Farthing:** When we were kids we went to church in the morning, in the afternoon we went to chapel and at night we used to go back to church.

There was a chapel where the garage is now at “Chapel House”. We used to have some lovely times there because every summer there used to be some people come called Mr and Mrs Taylor with “The Caravan Mission to Village Children.” And they used to bring a caravan and live in it up



*Children in the Scripture Union, outside the old chapel, now Chapel House. Back row, l to r: Hetty Farthing, Daphne Cockayne, Marion Tricker. Front row: Lavender Stiff, Grace Farthing, Joyce Spraggon, Marie Bull, Margaret Mowles, Pat Seggar, June Holland (evacuee, older sister of Patsy Holland)*

on the vicarage meadow. It was in the summer holidays and they used to virtually entertain us for a fortnight. We'd be in a Scripture Union and we used to chant and sing – they used to hold up these letters and we'd sing, “We are H-A-P-P-Y!”



**Norah Orriss:** Well, all the chapel songs are happy aren't they? And we used to have little bible books, didn't we? We used to learn these poems, and we'd all practise our things and finish up with this display and everybody used to come and watch us! Well, there wasn't any television was there? You had to amuse yourselves or else you didn't do anything.



**Grace:** And then at the end we'd go up to "West Sampsons Hall" and Mrs Partridge (Naomi's husband's mother) used to give us a massive tea party and a treasure hunt in the garden.



**Naomi Partridge:** We've always been non-conformist and had the little mission hall up the road. My husband used to preach and run the Sunday school every Sunday afternoon, and I used to play the organ. We'd have a Sunday school anniversary every year. Yes, we had quite a lot of children at one point and then there just weren't the children, only our own. The chapel closed not that long ago but we only had two or three people come and it needed a lot done to it. It did seem a shame to close it but nobody came.

People said, "Oh, you're not going to close, oh what a pity" – but they didn't come so there you are! It's the same with the church isn't it, people don't support it. In some ways, I would prefer to go to the village church as I live in the village but I

suppose non conformist is traditional for me, so I go to Hadleigh off the market place opposite the Corn Exchange.



**Rachel Wells:** We had to go to Sunday school. It was held in the corner of the church where the magazines are sold now. There was a blue carpet, and the little stools which are still up there now were round a table for us. That was when I started doing flowers in church, and I've done them ever since! The table where the visitors' book is now was the altar for the Sunday school and I used to arrange flowers on there. They had that and the little cross which we've still got with two brass vases either side. All the children's books used to stand on that rail that's in front of the seats by the font now. The Baptismal Roll used to hang in the children's corner too. Quite a lot of children used to go, and you used to have a stamp every time you went, to put in your book.

Otherwise, on a Sunday we didn't go anywhere. We weren't allowed to go out and play in the road or anything. I can remember, even at Christmas time, if we had a present that was something to knit or embroider we always wanted to do it – but we weren't allowed on Christmas Day or a Sunday. I suppose we used to read a lot. Dad was a Methodist. He used to cycle to Polstead Chapel – that's a house, I think, now. That's where he went when he was a boy and he always carried on going there until that closed.

There's still a Methodist chapel in Elmsett but not one in Hadleigh. He sometimes went to the Mission Room on Kersey Tye – that was a part of the United Reformed.

All dad's family went to chapel – his brother who lived near Felixstowe did. When we went to Felixstowe on holiday we always went to chapel. But mother always went to church – and I can remember going to church on holiday as well! We always went to Felixstowe for our holiday when dad had finished harvest. We used to go the first week in September before we went back to school. Sometimes we stayed with our aunt and uncle at Trimley St Mary. We then used to go to Felixstowe from there on the train.



**Gladys Rice:** When we moved to Vale Lane the children used to go to the church Sunday school and we used to go to the seaside every year with that. Mrs Mowles and I always used to go together. There were ever so many children in the Lane then.



**Rachel:** We never went anywhere but Felixstowe, except to Walton on the Sunday school outing – and if the tide was in there wasn't any beach and you didn't get on the beach for ages. The beach at Walton is sandy, and I can always remember the sand in the sandwiches! I can hear mother

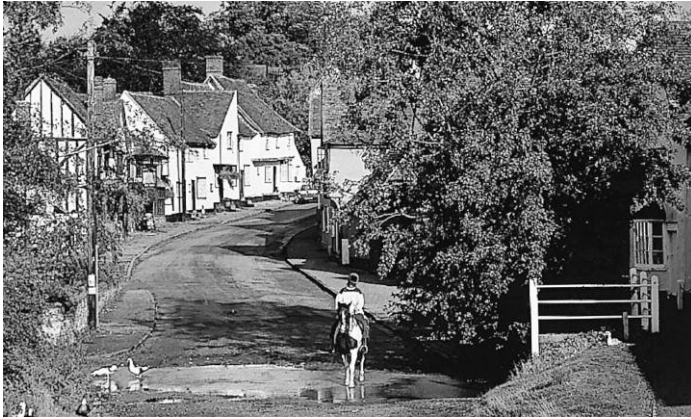
now, saying, "Go and wash your hands in that sea." So you'd go and then come back again and sit down and there would be sand on your hands again!



**Frances Whymark:** Ivy Tricker's father used to be our gardener, and Ivy used to look after Mrs Jarvis who lived in that thatched cottage right up the top of the hill, "Priory Holme". Mrs Jarvis was my godmother – Auntie Ada I called her. Every Sunday afternoon my mother and father used to go up and see Auntie Ada.

I had the most boring Sundays! I had to go to Sunday school, then to church and then I had to go up there in the afternoon and sit there while they chatted to this old lady! Yet I love going to church – isn't it amazing – you'd have thought it would have put me off for life. After my godmother died, Dorothy Webb bought her cottage and it was she who made that sampler of Prince Charles and Diana's wedding which hangs in the church. She did a lot for Kersey.

Yes, I have got tremendous faith. We used to go the Chapel where "Chapel House" is and a group was set up there called The Young Disciples. It didn't last very long, but we had little green three quarter caps, and cuffs! We all got given a little New Testament bible and I think that's what started me really. I believe that things aren't just coincidences – they're meant to be. For instance, when we had to have our pony



*The calendar picture of Frances riding Velfa through the splash*

Velfa put down I was absolutely heart-broken. And the very next week I went into Keith Avis' in Hadleigh and there was this calendar with a photo of me riding Velfa through Kersey. I had no idea that that photograph had been taken. All the years we'd had him we hadn't seen a photograph of him on anything and there he was on that calendar. Somehow that made me feel a little bit less unhappy. That picture has been printed as a postcard since and you still see it for sale!

Mind you, I used to say once – and this was a long time ago – that it's alright to have faith when you've had a good life and nothing has gone wrong. But I've still got it. I'm just

lucky because I accept, whereas a lot of people would delve. Though, as I said to Ian Wilson once, it's very difficult – because of what's happened to me – to pass faith on to other people. They just think I'm mad, you know. If you've said prayers for lots and lots of people and they've died, it's not very easy is it! I know that perhaps it was best for them to die but other people don't.



**Rev. Ian Wilson:** I think that God has, necessarily, self-limited himself because – in order for us to be free beings and to freely choose to turn to him and to have a relationship with him – we have to live in an environment that also is free. I understand that and I see that, and it doesn't actually alter my faith in him.

The problem is that people who have experienced storms and major disasters, who have suffered and lost loved ones, are really made to wonder, “Can this be true?” So any explanation as to why we suffer and why things happen is always limited for those who are particularly suffering. And, often, the only thing that will make any sense is actually coming to a conclusion for yourself.

If we try and explain away some of these things to people who are most affected by them, we are in danger of not connecting with where they are and where God is in relation to where they are. Often they can actually experience God in

their suffering, in a way that makes more sense to them, rather than somebody from outside coming up and saying, “Yes – but don’t worry – I think it’s just that God can’t do anything about that, because...” Those suffering are more likely to ask, “Is God God, then?”

He’s there, he’s suffered and – ultimately – if Jesus’ death



and resurrection has anything to say to us it’s that all that pain and suffering will be taken into God and transformed and that life does not cease to exist when we die. Life continues and God is there in that, through the death and the resurrection of Jesus. And I believe that absolutely. That’s

the hope that we all have, including people who suffer as a result of the environment or at the hands of other people.



**Gladys Rice:** We had a choir here many years ago and my daughter Pam was in it. There were a lot of children in the choir then. But then that fell away. And then it started again, and Ruth Gleed and Eileen were in it, weren’t you?



**Eileen Gleed:** We didn’t have choir robes at first because we had our coffee morning to raise money for them down at Jill Harbinson’s – she was our choir mistress. I’ve always gone to church.



**Gladys:** There were black and white robes but they were men’s so we raised enough money and bought the blue and white ladies’ ones. I was baptised down the Baptist chapel – I was submerged you know! Because you couldn’t belong to the Baptist chapel and be a communicant unless you were. But in Rev. Edward Caller’s time I was confirmed in church because I couldn’t get to Hadleigh to the Baptists.



**Eileen:** I was confirmed on the 3rd June, me and another

*The choir in Easter 1982 in their blue robes, with choir mistress Jill Harbinson, back row far right. On this occasion the regular members were augmented by five Kersey youngsters wearing black men's robes: Cathy Whymark in white socks is second from left front.*

girl from Whatfield, but I can't remember what year that was. And I used to walk up to the Non-Conformist chapel when John and Naomi Partridge ran that.



**Gladys:** Yes, I used to go there nearly every Sunday when I lived in Wickerstreet Green. My children were very tiny then, and I remember one winter there was ever such a lot of snow and I took them on a sledge! We used to have Anniversaries and my two used to say verses and I'd go and join them and help with the singing.



**Eileen:** Naomi Partridge is my age and we used to have



Anniversaries at Whatfield chapel and we used to do “dialogues”, all to do with religion.



**Gladys:** I was in the Mothers' Union. I've been in most things in Kersey! Oh yes, that was lovely. There was a garden room at the vicarage and that was where they held the

Mothers' Union. It had a harmonium in it what Mrs Mumford had off me. She knew I wanted to get rid of it because my daughter was taking piano lessons so she asked me whether I'd like to part with it and I said, "Yes, you can have it." And she loved it – it sounded nice for hymns, you know. Kersey was joined with Lindsey then, so the Lindsey Mothers' Union used to come to us and we used to go over to Lindsey.



**Grace Farthing:** I can remember Mary Holden going to the Mothers' Union meetings when Robert was small and Daisy Spraggon used to take Pauline – I can remember all these ladies going up to the vicarage with their posh hats on!



**Rachel Wells:** I can remember going to the Mothers' Union meetings from school. The lady what worked at the vicarage used to come and collect the children whose mothers were members and take us over to the vicarage garden room where the meetings was held. Robert Holden's the same age



*Mrs Mumford near right of the banner, Mary Mowles second left front row with Rachel in white at her feet, and Mary Holden second right with Robert on her knee.*

as me and he used to go.

The garden room used to be where the garage is now. I can remember that always used to be hot because they had a big fire in there. It was Reverend Mumford who was there then. Actually the garden room got burnt down eventually because the Reverend Thomas, who came later, lit a bonfire

right near it which got out of hand!



**Mary Holden:** My mother and I both went to the Mothers' Union – we used to enjoy it. It was somewhere to take the children and be all together. We all worked very hard selling needlework and so on to get enough money to buy the banner. A few times in Hadleigh church I carried that banner and it was very heavy! You see it still in Kersey Church, but the Mothers' Union changed altogether later on.



**Gladys Rice:** They were here a long while, the Mumfords, one of the longest. Rev. Mumford was a nice gentleman, I couldn't fault him, but he was quiet. But Mrs Mumford was the go ahead one – she was wonderful for him. She used to remind him who he had to see and what he had to do, and I've heard him turn round and say to her, "I don't know what I'd do without you, dear."



**Paul Ryde:** For a long while I didn't have a hand brake for my little Ford car. I couldn't get a cable after the war, and the night the cable broke I was very grateful that the vicarage was built where it was, because I couldn't and

wouldn't have got round the corner, so I went to the vicarage instead! And I always remember the Reverend Mumford hearing the noise came out to see what it was – a very nice man, very capable man, and completely unflappable. He wasn't the least bit perturbed to see I'd driven almost into his house and all he said was, "We're just having a sherry, would you like one?" I thought it was very nice of him.



**Eileen Glead:** Reverend Mumford said to my brother, "Whatever do you want to get married on Boxing Day for?" But he married him! Kenny Glead, my brother-in-law, always used to work at the vicarage – he was gardener there.



**Gladys Rice:** Daisy Mumford was lovely – she was just like a mother to the whole village. We used to have fetes in the vicarage garden. She used to do a lot here, didn't she? It was nothing for her to go over to the church and scrub that chancel before breakfast – I worked for her, so I know. And she used to get Kenny to take the steps over and she'd whitewash those porches out before anybody was about in the morning. She was the nicest little person – she'd cook for people, make apple pies and everything. There used to be two cottages on the corner by the school where there's only one now. There used to be a Tit Clark in one with his son,

Jabo, who was deaf and dumb. And Mrs Mumford used to take them all little cookies and things.

She had two boys, and I used to go there two mornings a week. That was a big old place but Gladys Warren's mother worked there as well. I had to give up when I was going to have Ruth, and I kept going in for days and days and couldn't tell her! But I had to in the end.



**Leslie Williams:** At one time people in the village would volunteer to cut the grass in the church yard. We never got paid but when a decent vicar was there we used to get a couple of pints of beer, perhaps.



**Sheila Zurbrugg:** Besides being Church Warden for seven years (Robert previously for seven years) I helped Vivien Lemon edit the newsletter during an interregnum and enjoyed arranging and saying prayers at services. I wish I could still manage to do flower arranging in the church – it was a great pleasure. I came off the P.C.C. for a while when both Robert and Anthony were members – too many people from one family!



**Gladys Rice:** I used to be on the P.C.C. and I've helped clean



*Willing helpers ready to clean the church. From left: Daisy Cockayne, Ada Briggs, Rachel Mowles, George Emmerson, Nellie Baalham, Mary Mowles and Evelyn Baalham.*

the church for years. When Mrs Mumford was there we used to scrub every chair. We were outside scrubbing them when my son in law came long to say that my daughter had had her baby – Verena never forgot that!



**Mary Holden:** The vicarage was very cold before it was sold. There was a large kitchen and an Aga but that didn't heat the house. There was no heating then and it was very draughty!



**Ray Goymour:** I reckon the most attractive place in Kersey now is the vicarage. It must be worth a bomb – everybody wants an old vicarage don't they? But they won't let you call them The Vicarage – you have to call them The Old Vicarage or something like that – hence “Kersey Vicarage”.



**Michael Harbinson:** When my first wife, Mary, and I came to Kersey the vicar was the Rev. H Donald Thomas, and a lady from Boxford said of him, “Oh, you've got the parson who's got religion!” And this was an accurate description because he had very little contact with the local population. In those days Kersey was linked with Lindsey and there was one woman in Lindsey who, being asked what she thought of the new vicar, carried on her job of scrubbing the floor as she said, “Always praying for people all over the world. Wish he's pray for us sometimes!.”

Mary and I had come from a very organised and prosperous parish just outside Ipswich and, here, we were rather horrified to see very small congregations and a choir which consisted of Ruby Gleed, Harold Briggs and – when

they were available – the wife and two children of the Reverend Thomas. The organist was Mrs Gillingwater, who was old Jack Stiff's sister and she, unfortunately, died of cancer not long afterwards.

I'd been church warden for my previous parish and also treasurer, and Reverend Thomas came to see me one day and confided that he felt he couldn't go and visit his parishioners as there seemed to be no subject of conversation which was common ground. And he couldn't sing all these hymns in the hymn book because Victorian theology was out of date.

So I said to him, “These people whom you rather disparage are the backbone of your congregation. They have grown up to think of religion in these terms, they're used to these things and you're depriving them of them. You mustn't do that.” And he found it very difficult to take. He was completely divorced from the reality of life in a country parish with the result that no one wanted to go to church and he had to be treasurer as well. This was more or less fatal!

But when Rev. Thomas was succeeded by Rev. G R W Goddard in 1968, there were quite a few changes. One memorable change concerned the Mothers' Union which had been struggling a bit ever since Rev. and Mrs Mumford left. Mrs Goddard did not approve of the Mothers' Union as it was and converted it to a club for all the women of the parish with a much wider range of objectives and activities.

This eventually became known as the Tuesday Club, under which name it is still flourishing.



**Rev. Ian Wilson:** We used to have two hundred plus at the communion services in Whitton where I was curate, and on my first Sunday here at Kersey I wondered what on earth I was doing really because there seemed so few people. St Mary's Kersey is a beautiful church with a very spiritual atmosphere. The communion service this morning (Thursday) was lovely and I just don't know why more people don't come.

But, one of the things that the church always has to be is relevant to the community in which it serves, and what has happened is that there has been a real change in the community here. There are now a lot more young families with children which, in the six or seven years I've been here, the village hasn't had. We do need to engage with that and offer them something appropriate to them – so the reintroduction of the Family Service really is a key. It's informal, it's fun and it's brief, so if you come in with an armful of babies it's not daunting.



**Frances Whymark:** I stopped going to church when I was about thirteen and didn't go any more until I was married. I

was confirmed when I was expecting Cathy – we used to say she'd been confirmed twice! My friend Maureen (Andrew Hazel's mum) and I were confirmed together because we were great chums. I'm godmother to three of her children and she's godmother to Nicki.



**Rachel Wells:** Everybody kept telling me I would be a church warden like my mother and grandfather but I don't think I expected to be. You see, I wasn't confirmed until the 1980's when Gerald Harrison was the priest in charge. I kept saying, "Oh well, I can't be on the P.C.C. because I haven't been confirmed." That was my excuse! In fact, my sister Jen wasn't confirmed until a few years ago – at the same time as her daughter Sarah was. I don't know why we were so late being confirmed because we always used to go to church and Sunday school when we was little.



**Rev. Ian Wilson:** I was made to go to Sunday school as a child, and sang in the church choir. But when I was a teenager "reason" set in and I abandoned church altogether for a time. It was a process of actually believing in God but trying to make the connection between that belief and what I was experiencing in my life and what people around me were experiencing. Gradually, I came to the conclusion that the

two do connect and they connect because of Jesus – the life that he led and what happened to him. If we believe that he was the son of God then it intensely and intimately connects with our lives now, because he was a human being as well as the son of God and that makes a real difference to how he sees us and how we can see him.



**Frances Whymark:** Bill Sands was the Vicar here when Cathy died, and he helped me a lot. Not a lot of people liked Bill but he was so down to earth you could talk to him about anything. He came from Glasgow so he'd seen life in its roughest state. He used to come in and you'd say, "Would you like a cup of coffee, Bill?" and he'd say, "I'd rather have a whisky!" or "Can I use you loo?"

Sir David Scott-Barrett complained to the Bishop about him because he used to have house groups and once he asked everybody to give their idea of "heaven". And Sir David reckoned he'd been irreverent. Sir David was a funny old boy, but the letter he wrote me about Cathy was lovely. Most of the letters were a great comfort.



**At my request, Joan Hattrick, Churchwarden for the past ten years wrote the following account. It is valuable, not only as a record of what Joan has learned and achieved in**

**"THE REST OF US COULD NOT BELIEVE OUR LUCK – A TALL, GOOD LOOKING, YOUNG PRIEST WHO REALLY SEEMED TO WANT TO COME TO OUR BENEFICE!"**

*Joan Hattrick*

knew nothing! ... Bill Sands then took a post in Zimbabwe and left Leslie Cockayne – the other Churchwarden – and me to cope! Michael Harbinson, our Elder, was invaluable in this period, and with the help of the Rural Dean of Hadleigh we managed to arrange a service in the Church every Sunday during the interregnum... . Leslie was also a great help ... he was a Cambridge graduate – studying history and theology – a great traditionalist and a stickler for the niceties of Church etiquette.

With the Churchwardens of the other two Benefice parishes we then took part in the selection of Revd. Ian Wilson as our new Vicar. He was questioned closely by Leslie

**her position, but also as a tribute to Mary Mowles who was a legend in her own lifetime and will certainly continue as such:**



**Joan Hattrick:** Revd. Bill Sands asked me to become a Churchwarden in 1991 when Mary Mowles retired due to ill health. She was my closest neighbour and had been Churchwarden for 26 years. She advised me wisely on the duties of Churchwarden, about which I

*Left to right,  
Joan Hattrick,  
Rachel Wells,  
Marianne Lash  
and Julie Boast  
arranging the  
beautiful altar  
frontal which  
they and other  
villagers  
designed and  
crafted at  
Julie's  
instigation)*

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on his beliefs, his preferences regarding services and his plans – quite rightly – but the rest of us could not believe our luck – a tall, good looking, young priest who really seemed to want to come to our Benefice!... He joined us in July 1993... and works hard for the congregation and the people of the village. It is a pleasure to work with him.

Sadly Leslie died in 1994, and Rachel Wells then became my co-Churchwarden... Being Mary Mowles' daughter Rachel knew a lot more about some things than I did. The Churchyard, organising the flowers and the sales table are her specialities, but between us we share the tasks and work very well together.

Four achievements during my time as Churchwarden have given me particular satisfaction. When I took over from Mary Mowles she was 81 and not in good health. A churchgoer all her life, she had been on the Parochial Church Council for over 40 years and Churchwarden for 26 years. These are just facts – they do not tell of the hundreds of hours of steadfast service she had given to the Church and the village in that time, and I felt this should be commemorated by a plaque in the Church.

The plan was supported by Ian Wilson and the P.C.C., and in due course, despite all the bureaucratic obstacles the Diocese put in our path, the plaque was placed in the Chancel near to the vestry door. Leslie Cockayne was keen to plant some trees in the new Churchyard, and again

surmounting all obstacles, this was achieved, though sadly after Leslie died.

Rachel and I launched the Kersey Cook Book in 1997, the recipes mostly supplied by Kersey folk, and it has sold steadily since then. Finally, after 30 years (!) of negotiations with Kings College, Cambridge – who are responsible for the upkeep of the Chancel – restoration work to the stonework and windows was completed in 1998, and we were overjoyed to have a view through the windows, and to see sunlight and evening light pouring in. There is something very special about Suffolk skies, especially Suffolk skies at sunset.

I think the Church dominates the village, but I hope in a protective way. In the numerous baptisms, occasional weddings and sadly, many funerals the Vicar and Churchwardens see the past, present and the future of the whole parish. Even if people are not regular churchgoers they want the Church to be there for them at these important stages in their lives.

In our capacity as Churchwardens Rachel and I are carrying on the work of past parishioners who held the posts ... and it is a privilege to be entrusted with the task. There is a feeling of history and continuity; caring for the Church in Kersey for the future. The congregation is small and has been shrinking, so support is thin on the ground.

However, with younger families in the village and the Church school numbers increasing, we go forward in faith.

We trust that we can accept changes and new ideas and that the enthusiasm and sincerity of Ian Wilson will encourage more villagers to join us.



**With such a wealth of material at my disposal, it has been difficult to decide how best to arrange this chapter. But how to end it has never been a problem for me. Here are some thoughtful words of Rev. Wilson's and a human and moving anecdote from Claude Munson:**



**Rev. Ian Wilson:** One of the classic beliefs about God is that he cannot change, so consequently can he suffer because sometimes you have to suffer to change? And the answer must be, yes he does, that was evident on the cross. Jesus suffered intensely. But he also suffered all kinds of human emotions before he was crucified and all of that is drawn into God and therefore all human experience is also drawn into God. And so, when we suffer, he suffers as well.

It's like being a parent – when your children are in trouble or in pain you suffer with them because you love them so much. But you have to let them grow into adulthood by experiencing things for themselves and making their own decisions. And I think that's the same for God. He must absolutely weep, often, at the sorts of things we do with our

lives and the way it affects other people as well.



**Claude Munson:** You see, I must say I've been a bad drunkard all my life. My dad made his own brewed beer – that was real malt and hops, you know – and he was the last in Kersey to make it. And we used to take it to work and drink it. I had a couple of silly accidents falling off a bike, drunk! When you're drunk like that you don't feel no pain do you?

I helped my father with his last lot of that patent beer you could buy at the chemist in cans. That were quite nice but not like the brew me dad used to make – that was strong.

Mind you, when I look back, those were my happiest times – getting drunk! But I had to give it up, had to. It was either that or it would have killed me. I was nearly dead just a few years ago and all I was a-craving for in hospital was a pint of Guinness or a fag, and they told me if I kept on it would kill me. They didn't want me to come home, they wanted me to go to the convalescent place in Felixstowe but I turned it down and said, “No, I want to come home to Scooby.” But I promised I wouldn't drink and I haven't.

And, ever since, I've walked up to the church every evening with Scooby and just stook in the porch and touched the church wall and said, “Thank you, God, for another day.”