

THE MAYS OF CARDINHAM..

Frederick Granville May was inducted as Rector of Cardinham Parish in 1900. Born in 1857, he was then forty three, and his wife Kate was two years older. She was a member of the Archer Family from Trelaske House, in East Cornwall. The Mays already had two children, Paul, born in 1898, and Tom, born the following year, when they moved into the large Rectory at Cardinham, situated conveniently on the South side of the Church.

Their third and last child, a girl, always known as Grace, was born to them in 1901. She was rather vexed the whole of her life because she missed being a Victorian by just under a year, Queen Victoria having died in January 1901. Her brothers apparently took every opportunity of reminding her of the fact!

So began for the family an idyllic period. True, money was in short supply. The May family finances had fluctuated greatly over past years, and had been stupendously torpedoed by "Wicked Joseph" of Hale, Hampshire, whose gambling was always unsuccessful. Fred was one of six brothers, several of whom went on to have distinguished and financially successful careers, and it was recognised by the family that in following in his father's footsteps, Fred was doing the "God bit" for the family, and deserved a bit of help from time to time. From his small stipend, - even by today's standards £240 a year was not a lot, Fred had to pay for Rectory and Chancel repairs, add money to the pensions of two former Rectors of the parish, and maintain several servants. There was not a lot left for groceries, heating, and holidays, and certainly not for the private education of the children.

The family quickly became integrated into the parish community, and the arrival of Grace in the following year, 1901, must have helped, although her mother was by that time 46 years of age. They received great help and loyalty from the people of Cardinham, and in response set out to serve the parishioners in every way possible. People were visited in their homes regularly by the Rector, - a hazardous business for him as this often involved sampling a glass of homemade wine, and later he would take his two boys, who competed to see which of them could eat the most teas. Tom ran out the winner, with a score of five, including pork chops at the last one!

Meanwhile Grace resolved to keep up with her brothers if it was the last thing she did, and was always out in the woods and countryside, to the detriment of her feminine garments. They were avid birds nesters, but only ever took one egg from the nests of the rarer birds. As the boys grew larger and heavier, getting to rooks nests in high and rather fragile trees became a problem, so the solution was to send Grace up the tree. She would cheerfully tuck her skirt into her knickers and shin up the highest tree! Once up, you transferred an egg or two to your handkerchief, which you then held in your teeth. Biting at the wrong moment, or knocking the cargo against a branch could result in a nasty mess, and condemnation from your brothers and mother at home who had to try and wash the handkerchief.

Transport round the hilly area of the village was quite a challenge. As far as I know none of the children were horse riders, probably because the family could not afford the right kind of horse or pony, but Grace and her brothers used to ride bare back on the pony that pulled the trap, around the paddock below the Rectory. Longer journeys involved the pony trap or donkey cart, superintended by Old Doney the coachman. In both cases

the passengers had to walk up hills, and walk down the steeper ones, so that a lot of the journey was actually accomplished on foot.

Frederick and Kate might not have much money, and none to spare over and above the necessities of life, but they still placed great value on the education of their three children and fortunately for the children other members of their wider family agreed with this importance. Rich and generous relatives found the money to pay for Pauls school fees at Marlborough College, and then also for Tom's fees at Sherborne School in Dorset, the school his father had attended. Further it was decided that Grace should not be overlooked, so in 1914, tat very fateful year, she was sent to Godolphin School in Salisbury. Up to that time she had been educated by a governess, also paid for by a relative.

In that year, in far away Sarajevo, an Archduke was unlucky enough to be assassinated, an event which changed the fortunes of the May family for ever.

The First World War had a huge and immediate impact on the parish of Cardinham, as it did throughout the land. Dozens of men joined the forces, and the majority went to fight in France. Those left behind filled the gaps as best they could. The Rector undertook to do the postal delivery first thing every weekday, and walked the whole of his parish in all weathers delivering the letters. There must have been very few parish priests in history who visited all their parishioners before breakfast!

Meanwhile those young lads still at school yearned for the moment when they could join up and do their bit, and school cadet corps became hugely important training grounds. By 1915 Paul was 17 and old enough to enlist. He joined the Devon Regiment, and in 1916, at the age of 18 was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and sent over to France. He was killed leading the assault on Vimy Ridge on 14th April 1917.

The family were stunned. Frederick had already spent the best part of three years comforting parishioners whose sons had been killed in France, or at sea. But when it was your own, eldest son, it was totally different. Somehow the family managed to come to terms with their loss, and to soldier on. They seemed even more united to the whole grieving country and parish. Christmas 1917 was a time for remembering the person who was missing from the dining table.

Meanwhile Tom May, now 18, had already started his training to be a pilot in the Royal Naval Air Service, which was later to become the Royal Air Force. On 6th November he did his first solo flight, at about 200 feet! On Nov. 12th he went with another pilot to fetch a new machine, and commented "engine stopped twice, and missing on 2 cylinders all the time." Talk about hair raising!

His first long distance flight from Cranwall to Boston and Lincoln and back involved two crash landings, one a "pancake" in a cornfield. Thanks to local muscular help, and extra supplies of petrol he managed to get back safely to base making a "good landing in the semi-darkness."

By early August 1918 Tom was ready to go to France, and on the 7th sent a postcard to his family saying that he was due to sail for France on a Destroyer later that day. On the 9th August he was killed, presumably in a flying accident, near Calais, at the age of 19. It was traditional for new pilots to give a demonstration of their flying ability to their fellow pilots. Did Tom's demonstration go hideously wrong?

Tom's totally unexpected death shattered the family. His father had a mental breakdown, and never really worked again. He also developed a very bad heart condition.

His mother soldiered on as best she could, with many worries surrounding her, but a great burden fell on 17 year old Grace, who gave up her education at Godolphin, and returned home to give help and support.

The people of the parish were wonderfully supportive, and the family managed to struggle along for more than a year, but it became more and more obvious that Fred. Would have to give up the parish, and so in 1920 he retired and they moved to the village of Tuckenhay in South Devon.

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