

RECTOR'S FAREWELL, 1932

20 Years' Work in the Parish



The Rector of East Knoyle, the Rev William Neville, who has retired from active work, and Mrs Neville, left the parish this week for their new home at Guildford. Before leaving they received a number of presents, one being subscribed by the parish as a whole, and several others by organisations with which they have been associated. They have lived and worked in the parish for 20 years and during that time have been responsible for several improvements to the church and seen many changes. Notably, during that period there has been a large decrease in the population of the parish.

When Mr Neville came there in 1912 from Reading, where he had been vicar of St Mary's for 15 years, the population was about 853. At the present time, owing chiefly to the decline in agriculture, it is 650. Before going to Reading, Mr Neville had charge of the parish at Butleigh in Somerset where he ministered for five years.

Mrs Neville has never spared herself for the welfare of both the church and the parish. She has been voluntary organist, superintendent of the Sunday school, Cub Master and Assistant Commissioner of Cubs for South and West Wilts. She efficiently represented the parish for a number of years on the Mere Rural District Council, and has done an immense amount of work for the Mother's Union and the Women's Institute.

Mr Neville is being succeeded as rector of East Knoyle by the Rev Ernest Cross, who for several years has been secretary to the Bishop of Salisbury. Mr Cross is a young man with a musical gift. A baritone singer of good merit, he has been active in Salisbury in connection with the local branch of the British Music Society, of which he is chairman.

Farewell Sermon

Mr Neville preached his farewell sermon in the old church (of which Sir Christopher Wren's father was rector more than 300 years ago) on Sunday evening, taking as his text the words of St Paul to the Corinthians: "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all". After dwelling upon the circumstances in which St Paul wrote those words, Mr Neville spoke at some length on the aims that he had had in teaching the people during the 20 years he had been there and ended by urging the people to persevere in their religious duties.

The parish presentation was made on Wednesday evening of last week in the village hall, which was packed to its utmost capacity. The chair was taken by Mr F W Barnes, who with Mr F Alford, one of the churchwardens, organised the large subscription list. They were supported by Mr W Dowding, the other churchwarden.

The gifts to which, with other parishioners, the Women's Institute and the scholars of the East Knoyle Day School, subscribed consisted of a suitcase wireless set for the rector and two garden chairs and a Carnarvon seat for Mrs Neville, together with the list of the subscribers, beautifully bound in blue velvet calf.

Church Improvements

Mr Barnes, in the course of a tribute, said they met that night on a somewhat unique occasion, as since 1865 - 67 years ago - there had been none like it. They had met to express their appreciation of all that the Rector and Mrs Neville had done for them and the parish during the twenty years they had shared their joys, helped them in their troubles, and guided them to serve God truly and to become better men and women. When the Rector came to East Knoyle in 1912, he followed a man who was greatly beloved and who had seen almost 47 years of parish work there. The Rector and Mrs Neville had had placed in the church a new altar with its beautiful hangings and furniture; a surplice choir helped them in their singing, and changes were made in the services. The rector, by his own efforts, succeeded also in raising sufficient money to pay for the splendid system of heating that they now had in the church. Those of them who remembered the low temperatures of the old could well feel thankful to him for that.

The rector and Mrs Neville had been there less than two years when the Great War broke out, which upset nations and Empires, leave along country parishes. To the parents of 17 of the village men who made the Great Sacrifice they brought consolation and spiritual comfort. In those dark days, especially, the rector was very truly their leader. He led them in special prayers in that anxious and disturbed time, and induced in them some measure the peace of God and of the Holy Spirit. Then, too, the side altar would always remain a lasting memorial to them both. The rector's love of children showed itself in his many acts of kindness to them. His fatherly interest in their physical and spiritual welfare had indelibly impressed itself on their memories, not only on the children of today, but on the hundreds who had grown up. One memorial to his interest in the school children was the gate which he himself had erected to ensure that the scholars should not be injured by passing motor traffic.

Continuing, Mr Barnes said he did not know whether the rector had ever entertained a thought of becoming an editor, but there were very few among them who had not at some time or another heard him tell a humorous story, and he was sure that if he were to collect all those stories the rector had told, and published them in book form, it would be quite a big volume. Perhaps he would find that a spare time job at Guildford. There would be a good sale in Knoyle.

Mrs Neville's Work

Of Mrs Neville they could truly say that she had been the rector's right hand. They did thank her most whole-heartedly for having been their unpaid organist for so many years. They were also grateful for her work with the choir, her care of the altar furniture, and her beautiful arrangements of the flowers there.

In the dark days of war, to which he had previously referred, Mrs Neville, with other parishioners, gave up her time to train and act as a nurse the Red Cross Hospital, not for months, but for years, in addition to keeping up all the parish duties she did so well. Then, too, her name would live in the lifelong memories of all those boys whom she had trained as Cubs. He said without hesitation that there were no Cubs with a keener mistress or one who gave up and did so much for them. Mrs Neville had thrown herself whole-heartedly into the work of the Sunday school. She had been Superintendent ever since she came and often had to carry on with very little help.

Their chief feelings were those of gratitude, real and sincere, for all that they had done, and their hearts were full of good wishes for them. He hoped the life before them at Guildford would be blessed abundantly, and that perfect happiness and good health would be with them always. Of one thing he was sure, and that was that they would always have the loving affection and deepest gratitude of their late parishioners of East Knoyle.

The gifts were then handed to the rector and Mrs Neville by Mr Alford and Mr Dowding. Mr Alford said the gifts had been subscribed for by the whole parish and he hoped the rector would live long to enjoy them. Mr Dowding also expressed his good wishes.

Rector's Reply

The rector, in reply, said how greatly he appreciated the gifts to himself and Mrs Neville. He thanked the churchwardens, sidesmen, choir and ringers for their help. He asked them to be as kind to his successor, the Rev E Cross, as they had been to him. He concluded by thanking all parishioners for their gifts and by paying a tribute to all who had helped him in his work, mentioning particular Mr Barnes who had been his right hand man.

Mrs Neville, who was touched by the tributes, also expressed her thanks. She said she hoped that Knoyle parishioners would go sometime to Guildford to sit in the chairs and seats.

The Rector then asked the people to stand so that he could give them his blessing, which brought the meeting to a close.

At the meeting of the Mothers' Union on Thursday afternoon, the last to be presided over by Mrs Neville, she was presented with a black Morocco leather blotter with silver corners. The presentation was made by Mrs Jones, one of the oldest members, who asked her to accept the gift with the grateful thanks of all the members who would miss her very much and who hoped that they would see her very often. Mrs Neville, in reply, said that the beautiful gift would always remind her of the East Knoyle branch.

Sunday School Tribute

On Sunday afternoon, the teachers and scholars of the Sunday school came to the rectory to present Mrs Neville with a parting gift, subscribed for by them in appreciation of her work as superintendent. The gift, which took the form of a blue despatch case, was presented by one of the scholars, Betty Ford. Mrs Neville, acknowledging the gift, spoke of her happiness in the Sunday school work, and gave good counsel to the teachers and scholars. Recently, the cubs and choir boys handed Mrs Neville their token after a service in the church. The gift, a perpetual calendar, was presented by the smallest choir boy, Maurice Fletcher.

The Rector's Thanks

To the Editor of the Western Gazette

Dear Sir, I wish, on behalf of myself and Mrs Neville, to express through your columns, our sincere gratitude for the splendid present they gave to us on our leaving East Knoyle. That present, as well as many others which we have received, together with the affectionate feeling shown by the givers, will every remain in our hearts as a precious memory.

I am yours faithfully,

William Neville

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