

Blidworth and District Historical & Heritage Society

The Ancient Blidworth Rockings Ceremony

The ceremony would appear to be unique to the Church of St. Mary in the village of Blidworth and has origins that go back at least 400 years. The Rocking Ceremony, held at St Mary of the Purification, marks the presentation of baby Jesus at the temple in Jerusalem. The congregation of the church usually swells to five times its usual number of 30, to see the event.

The ancient custom was revived in 1842 by the Reverend Martin Roe, the vicar at St. Mary's from 1842 to 1849, and revived again in 1922 by the Reverend John Lowndes, who, incidentally presided at the funeral of Joseph Whitaker.

A newspaper cutting written in 1896 by Rev Richard Whitworth was brought to the attention of the Rev John Lowndes in 1922. It described a beautiful custom, previously carried out in Blidworth Church, known as the Rocking.

A Mrs Eliza Pointon of Fairlight cottages had a centuries old cradle, and she generously gave it to be used in the church for the rocking ceremony. From that time onwards, using the original cradle, the annual ceremony has taken place, usually in the afternoon of the first Sunday in February. All of the babies who have taken part in the Rocking Ceremonies have their names recorded upon a plaque at the rear of St Mary's Church with their full name and the year in which they were 'Rocked', beginning in 1922 with the baby Clifford Simpson.

The baby is rocked on the Sunday nearest to Candlemas (February 2nd). Traditionally the chosen baby is a boy, born nearest to Christmas Day and is the child of married Christian parents living in Blidworth.

In 1924 three babies were rocked! Twins, born to Mrs Birch were eligible to be rocked, but another couple claimed their child should also be rocked as he had been born at around the same time as the twins.

In 1980 the rocking ceremony was performed by John Denis Wakeling, the Bishop of Southwell. The child was Edward William Tristram who received a commemorative bible to mark the occasion, inscribed by the Bishop.

Usually after the presentation, the child is rocked in a flower decked cradle that is placed before the altar. In earlier times after the service, the baby whilst still in the cradle was carried in procession through the village to the sound of much rejoicing. Mr John Bailey, a church warden who did much to improve the church in the 19th century had seen something of the old-time celebrations. He told the story in rhyme:



Rev. John Lowndes Blidworth
Vicar 1921-1933

T'was in a cradle decked and graced
 With flowers and antique ornament
 Mothers their infant child placed.
 And up the hill to church they went
 From Fishpool cots they duly came
 From Blidworth and from Fountindale
 And the good folk did just the same
 Who lived at Blidworth in the Vale.
 Many such Rockings there have been
 In the old church the good love well
 Which sanctifies the expanding scene
 Within the sound of Blidworth bell.



The ceremony was stopped in the 1600s because of the excesses of partying and drinking that went on around it. A stone and a cross in the church yard remembers a man, who according to local folklore was killed in a fight over a woman after one such party. Thomas Leake was the Verderer of Blidworth Forest in the latter part of the 16th century. Verderers investigated and recorded minor offences such as the taking of venison and the illegal cutting of woodland, and dealt with the day-to-day forest administration.

Will Richards tells the tale in his books.

The sixty year old Thomas Leake loved his wine, and the revelry of the Rocking threw him off his guard. He was drinking heavily at a wayside public house called the Archers, at the cross roads of Haywood Oaks. The land lady took exception to the amount of time that Tom spent with the daughter. Noting his defenceless condition and seizing the opportunity, she called on two young men, one of whom was a Captain Salmon of Salterford. Hot words were spoken as they sprang upon the old man of sixty. He died fighting manfully on Rockings day,

February 2nd 1598. Inside the church behind the door is Thomas Leake's memorial tablet in rhyme, erected in 1608.



In March 2010 a permanent Rockings' memorial was unveiled at the Forest Folk Corner by local Nottinghamshire County Councillor, Geoff Merry. The black metal cradle set upon a raised brick platform is a fitting tribute to Blidworth's most unique custom.

A good crowd of some 60 – 70 people turned out to witness the unveiling event. The bad weather did not deter them. The cradle was the creation of local resident Morris Reddington, who freely dedicated his time and skills. Morris, together with Blidworth Parish Council and Notts C.C. co-operated to bring this project to a successful completion.