

A DREADFUL ACCIDENT...

High drama that might so easily have been a tragedy is recounted in *Records of a Rocky Shore*, the pamphlet written in 1876 by Frances Hingeston Randolph while he was the vicar of All Hallows, Ringmore.

In the pamphlet Hingeston Randolph writes of the sextons who served All Hallows. In particular, he tells the story of William Rendle, much-loved member of the Ringmore community, sexton at the church for over half a century, and who who died in 1854 at the age of eighty-five.

William's half-century of devoted and loyal service as Sexton might never have been, for while still in his prime he suffered a gruesome accident that could have killed or blighted a lesser man. He and another labourer, William Revell, were felling oaks in woodland near Milburn ('at the foot of Stakes-hill, where the road to Aveton-Gifford enters the fords of the Avon'), and were making the deep coombe ring with their axe blows. Then, in Hingeston Randolph's words:

'Suddenly there was a cry, a pause, a stillness; and the strong man sunk down upon the earth, his life-blood fast oozing away from a ghastly wound on his wrist. Revell ran, at once, to the rescue, and with handkerchief and neck-cloth, as best he could, bound up the gaping gash and then made off to "Chapel", as men call it, - "St Anne's Chapel", as it is written down in maps... Soon the doctor was found and the brave fellow knew his doom; aye, and bore it like a man. They took off his arm a little below the elbow, and the sturdy labourer was compelled to be idle for a time. But, when he was healed of his wound, he returned with unabated vigour to his work; skilful hands had fitted a hook, which, when need so required, could be exchanged for a ring, to the poor stump, and the Ringmore sexton was as good a man as ever, and could even mow with his fellows, with the best of them, as in the days of old.'

We can imagine how Revell must have struggled and panted up the hill to St Ann's Chapel, desperate to enlist help and find the doctor. What we are not told is how long the rescue took or how and where the amputation was performed. (We have to remember that this is not first-hand reportage, for Hingeston Randolph did not know William Rendle: the latter died four years before Hingeston Randolph came to the parish.) But the pamphlet does tell us about Rendle's life before and after his accident and about the lives of Sextons who succeeded him and who were known personally to Hingeston Randolph.

These thirty-two pages of writing, often fervently moralistic and paternalistic in style, give a vivid insight into an aspect of life in Ringmore in the last half of nineteenth century.

[Copies of *Records of a Rocky Shore* are available from the Ringmore Historical Society.]

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