

My Grandfather
by Robert Bullen

My grandfather, Robert Carlos Swayne, was vicar of Thornton Steward from 1917 and served there for more than forty years and must have been a well known figure walking about the village. He was blind, but I am sure this never held him back, but in addition he suffered great tragedy soon after coming to Thornton Steward. In 1919 his wife, Elinora, drowned in the river near Woodhouse Farm whilst trying to save some local children who had got into difficulties. How this tragedy affected him is difficult to imagine, because at this stage there were three children in the family Joe, Molly and Barbara. I think his family must have rallied round because Aunt Rosie brought up the children and later on the children themselves helped by collecting tithes, playing the organ and being his guide about the parish. I can remember him as a man who loved children and entertained us by ~~repeating~~ imitating wild animal noises. Unfortunately we did not see much of him after this as our family emigrated to Kenya to hear wild animal noises for real.

All that is left are some family photographs, a family tree, old newspaper cuttings and snippets of family history. He was part of a large family of 14 children and ~~later~~ attended Worcester College for the Blind ^{where he became} Head Boy. He went to Keble College, Oxford, and studied Latin & Greek as a classical scholar. This cannot have been easy as in those days braille was the only way he could read and write, but people probably read books for him.

On the occasion of his jubilee, celebrating 50 years as a minister in the Church of England, he commented on the great changes he had experienced and the steady drift of people away from the country to the towns. What he