

# ***CREETING HOUSE***

(The First) Short history –

**Creeting House** is a Grade 2 listed four starred guest house, opposite Saint Mary's Church in All Saints Road. Originally on the site there was a small rectory but the building mysteriously burned down in 1861 leaving only the kitchen quarters standing. There is very little information about this house but following the fire William Lawrence Eliot, Clerk Rector to the consolidated parish of St Mary, Saint Olave's and All Saints Church applied to build a new rectory. The Bishop of Norwich queried this request indicating that the Reverend Eliot had allowed the old house to fall into a state of disrepair, the fire had conveniently destroyed the evidence. Two of the Rectors in the Diocese investigated and certified to the Bishop that it was not actually the Reverend Eliot's fault but the previous incumbent. As a gesture Reverend Elliot who had apparently received the sum of £1,500 in his post as Clerk Rector donated all of this money toward the building costs of the new rectory more than 80% of the total cost.

As you may know from previous Newsletter articles, Creeting St Mary had a strong association with Eton College going back to at least 1449 when the ownership of the Priory of Creeting St Olave was transferred by the monks to Eton College. We have been told that the staff and clergy from the college frequently used to visit Creeting, (and we assume College Farm on Creeting Hills), for "rest and recuperation".

The gentleman architect of the new rectory appears to only have designed buildings for his friends from Eton! Henry Woodyer (1816-96) was an important and talented Victorian architect who was described as one of the most poetical architects of the time (if there is any doubt about what that means then one look at Creeting House will supply a explanation). Born in Guildford, educated at Eton and Oxford, Woodyer had wealth and a country estate at Grafham, south of Guildford from where he operated his architectural practice. One of the most interesting aspects of his work was his connection with the Houses of Mercy, located at Clewer near Windsor, where he designed buildings to house fallen women within the context of a religious community. Piety and wit are perhaps the keynote to Woodyer's life and work, a sincerely devout High Churchman with a social conscience he still evidently enjoyed worldly pleasures such as sailing his yacht on the Mediterranean.

Woodyer prepared only four sets of drawings and had twenty hand written pages of instruction for the new building, leaving the builder (identity unknown) to work out the details for himself whilst Woodyer returned to his yacht whilst the rectory was built! He charged the sum of £1,862.12.6 for the new building less £40 for the use of reclaimed bricks and stone from the previous rectory an early example of recycling

Henry Woodyer must have known the Revd. Francis "Furse" Vidal originally the Curate of Clewer until 1867, and later Rector at Creeting from 1881 – 1909. A colourful character who was educated at Eton College, trained as an opera singer in Paris, lived in California for three years in the 1850's, and subsequently received a degree from Trinity Hall Cambridge. He married Lucy, daughter of Sir Robert Cunliffe, and they had thirteen children!

The Last Will and Testament of, the Revd. Francis Vidal of Sutton in the County of Suffolk (Francis' father) who died in 1884, provided his son, the sole Executor, with an

Estate of £17,055 9s. This gentleman had also led a varied life having been born in Jamaica, attended Eton, ordained as a deacon in Gloucester, and priest in Exeter, he was at sometime an S.P.G. Missionary in Australia.

I imagine that the inheritance to his son was much appreciated what with the thirteen children and his passion for breeding Arab horses at Creeting House. Some of these horses were apparently exported to America for breeding purposes.

Faith Stone was a niece of the Revd. Francis "Furse" Vidal and his wife Lucy and there are some lovely entries in her autobiography "As Much As I Dare" about the Arab horses and times she spent at the Creeting Rectory. She married [Sir Edward Montague Compton Mackenzie](#), author of the wonderful "Whisky Galore", in 1905. "*The most exquisite and fearful amusement at Creeting is hide and seek in the house with Uncle Dad pursuing us.*" I can vouch for this amusement – there was never a better house for hide-and-seek than Creeting House.!

So to sum up, the former rectory, now Creeting House, was rebuilt in 1863 and at a right angle to the left front elevation what looks to be an extension is in fact part of the original rectory. It is reputed that a tunnel connects the house and St Mary's church but this has not been found yet, and that there is a ghost (which is occasionally heard but never seen!). The house was listed in the 1980's as was the older Black Barn sited on the road frontage of the property.

Outbuildings include a timber framed barn that was built in the 1960's to accommodate a school swimming pool, a building which was apparently the dairy and washroom and a small garage/workshop which was once the apple store. Previously the site incorporated neighbouring Drift Cottage in the former orchard which adjoins the Barn and also included the site of St Olave House to the East of the house. Two small single storey flint buildings on Drift Cottage's land are listed as being within the curtilage of Creeting House, but the old cart lodge on the site disintegrated in the 1990's.

The house remained as a rectory until sold by the Church in 1954 to Cannon Fleetwood's wife following his death and was residential until 1963 when it was converted into a private school, initially by Oswald "Hammie" Jones and his wife. Such use continued until 1988 when it was converted for use as a commercial computer company and back into a home, for our family, in 1994. If you have any reminiscences of the house during the 20<sup>th</sup> century we would love to have them to help put together the second part of the Short History of Creeting House.

We have recently refurbished the house to offer Guest Accommodation at Creeting House and have just been awarded a 4\* Rating by Quality in Tourism/Visit Britain. The house is also available to rent for hospitality functions such as meetings, weddings, location shooting, and funeral gatherings.

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