

Adrian Prockter

The story of a shop in the village of Rockland All Saints,
Norfolk, between the years 1902 and 1919

Rockland All Saints

The village of Rockland All Saints is part of a small rural area, in Norfolk, called Rocklands, consisting of this village and the adjacent ones known as Rockland St Peter and Rockland St Andrew. The latter has no parish church.

The area is to the west of Great Ellingham a larger village, situated just west of the present alignment of the A11. Before the days of the bypass, built in the 1980s, the A11 ran through Attleborough, only three miles east of Rocklands.

A country road running west from Attleborough, runs under the A11 bypass, through Great Ellingham and acts as the boundary of the villages of Rockland All Saints and Rockland St Peter, although both parish churches are on the same side of that road.

Driving along that road from Attleborough, Rockland All Saints is on the left, approached by the long lane simply named 'The Street'.

At the end of 'The Street' lies what were once several shops, including a Post Office, on one side of the road, and a pub called the White Hart on the other. Further down 'The Street' stands the village primary school, still as busy as ever.

Unusually the parish church lies well outside the village, at the top of a short rise of land, about half a mile behind the pub.



Connections with the Village

My name is Adrian Prockter. I am the grandson of the principal character in this story whose name was Sydney Prockter. He ran one of the shops in the village in the early 1900s. He was married and had five children, all born in the village. I am the son of his fourth child, called Claude.

Sydney's father, William, my great-grandfather, also lived in the village with Sydney and died while the family owned the shop. William lies buried in the churchyard, in the far corner, beside the road.

I was first brought to the village by my father in the 1950s, to see the shop and learn about the village for myself. On that occasion, my father showed me the shop and the house beside it, in which the family lived. My father, of course, also showed me William's gravestone.

Since that time I have visited the village on numerous occasions and I have become great friends with a few people who still live in the village today.



Mrs Elsie Saunders

On one occasion, while visiting the village I had a chance meeting with Nora Lincoln whose mother, Mrs Elsie Saunders actually remembered my grandfather when he ran the village shop. Elsie died in 1995, aged 96 and by coincidence lies buried in the adjacent plot to my great-grandfather.

I was privileged to meet her several times and interviewed her, on video, talking about the shop.

This magazine is dedicated to Elsie Saunders and to her daughter Nora Lincoln, not forgetting her son-in-law Ronnie who sadly died in 1999. Through their kindness and interest in my family connections with the village, I have been able to tidy up many of the loose ends relating to the Prockters at Rocklands.

I have also met several other residents while visiting Rocklands and wish to thank them also for all their enthusiastic assistance.



Elsie Saunders, aged 89 (in 1990)

The Prockters

The connection with the Prockter family and the village of Rockland All Saints goes back to the years just after 1900.

Sydney Prockter was born in 1868, the son of William Thomas and his wife Susannah. Sydney had been born in London and lived at various locations. His last job in London was as a Floor Walker in the prestigious departmental store, Barkers of Kensington, which is still in business to this day.

While working at Barkers he met a shop assistant, Annie Robertson, also a Londoner, who had previously worked in another large departmental store, Bon Marché, at Brixton. In those days it was one of the most fashionable stores on the borders of Central London.

Sydney married Annie at Lambeth in 1902. He was then 34 years old and Annie was 33. For reasons that have never been explained, they decided to start up in business in a shop of their own. Neither of them had any known connections with Norfolk. Why two townies should want to move to the heart of the country cannot even be guessed at.

Shortly after getting married, they acquired one of the village shops. The building still stands opposite the White Hart PH, in Rockland All Saints but for many years it has been used as a private house.

Although not village people, they fitted in quite well and made a great success of the shop. They attended the parish church and their children attended the village school.



Sydney and his wife Annie (dates unknown)

The Prockter's Shop

The shop stood opposite the White Hart pub. It sold groceries on one side and clothes on the other. It seems that the locals knew it simply as 'The Prockter's Shop'.

In the early 1900s most communities were self-contained and all the locals would have shopped locally in the village. It is in stark contrast with today when large 'out of town' stores and shopping malls have attracted the local trade away from towns and villages alike.

It was probably a culture shock for the London couple to live in such a rural setting. Annie is remembered as saying one day that she had been "buried alive in the country".

Sydney Prockter remained at the shop, with his wife and family of five children, until 1919. They moved to Norwich where the family was to remain. Sydney obtained a job as a traveling salesman. He died in Norwich in 1942, of a heart attack, during the Second World War.



The Prockter's Shop about 1915. Outside can be seen the name board 'S E PROCKTER'. Either side are the words 'Grocer' and 'Draper'. Careful inspection of the photo reveals the tins of grocery in the right-hand window and the curtains and clothes on the left. Sydney ran the shop in two 'halves' with him looking after the grocery store on one side while his wife Annie was in charge of haberdashery and a large range of fashionable ladies clothes on the other.

Sydney Prockter is standing on the left of the doorway. The lady in the doorway is probably Mrs Annie Prockter.

On the far left is the edge of the building which the Prockters used as their home. The Prockters also owned the two semi-detached cottages on the right of the shop. One of the them can be seen, with its distinctive side wall.

William Prockter (Sydney's father) is standing with the dog. The horse-drawn 'van' was for the delivery boy to take orders to the houses around the village as well as the remote farms. Home deliveries were quite common in those days.

The Prockter's Shop



Right-hand window in the shop (enlargement of part of the previous picture). In this detail the tins are clearer to see. The sign on the window reads 'Eiffel Tower Lemonade'. in the doorway, between the two figures, the sign reads 'Tea, 1/8'. The price is, of course, in old money, equivalent to just under 10p. That price probably refers to a whole pound of tea and not a quarter as it would today.

Sydney stands on the left. The lady is probably his wife Mrs Annie Prockter.

The Prockter's Shop



Left-hand window in the shop (enlargement of part of the previous picture). It shows the clothes and fabrics which Mrs Prockter looked after. The general term for such items was drapery and haberdashery. It must be remembered that Mrs Prockter had worked at the prestigious Bon Marché, of Brixton, and the even more up-market Barkers of Kensington. She must have been well-acquainted with high-fashion for ladies in the West End of London. The clothing she provided in the country shop must have turned many heads of ladies who passed by.

The photograph seems to show curtains draped at the top of the window display. The round objects are probably ladies' hats, usually called 'bonnets'. Every lady had to wear a bonnet and, in those days, buying a new bonnet around Easter time was quite 'the thing' to be done !

The Prockter's Shop

Sydney's son Claude remembered that while the Prockters were in Rocklands, five of those years were during the First World War, which lasted from 1914 until 1918. Claude remembered that, during those years, there were many German prisoners of war working in the fields around the village. He used to hear them speaking German.

Sydney's shop was supplied with goods, sometimes by the supplier delivering them and sometimes by him fetching them from the wholesaler. Claude remembered that, at the time of the First World War (1914-18), wholesalers were quite worried about holding large stocks of any commodities in case their warehouses were bombed and all the stock was destroyed. Norfolk had quite a large amount of bombing during the First World War.

Apparently Sydney ordered a large quantity of tea which, in those days, was delivered in large wooden boxes, called tea-chests. The actual amount ordered was one ton which would occupy a large amount of space. The wholesaler had persuaded Sydney to take more than normal to spread the risk of the tea being lost if a bomb fell on the wholesaler's warehouse.

Claude remembered that the tea was stored everywhere. It was in the loft, in the out-houses and all around the shop. As supplies became scarce however, Sydney made a lot of money because customers traveled for miles to reach his shop which was known to have stocks of tea when many other shops had sold out, due to war-time shortages.



Another view of the shop. Sydney Prockter is standing to the left of the doorway. His wife, Mrs Annie Prockter, is probably the lady in the doorway. Other staff are outside, including a delivery boy, with his bicycle, and the cart driven by another delivery boy.

The Shop in 1973



Two views of the shop, taken on a sunny day in July 1973. The house may have been occupied but the shop was completely empty. Notice the railings outside the house, which are to be seen on the old black & white pictures. Sadly they were removed in the 1980s. The two red-brick houses also remain although the one nearer the camera has an additional brick-built porch.

The Shop in 1999



View of the house and shop from the car park of the White Hart, in December 1999. This view can be compared with the old photo of the shop with Sydney standing outside.

The railings are no longer surrounding the little garden in front of the house on the left. The shop doorway and display windows have gone from the original shop building.



Then . . . and . . . Now. About 85 years separate these two photos. The view on the left dates from about 1915 while the other was taken in late December 1999. The roof-lines and even the brickwork of the chimneys remain the same. The more unusual feature is the patterned bricks on the wall of the cottage.

The House



The House, taken before 1912. The Prockters lived next door to the shop. In this view, Sydney is posing for the camera while sitting in his new motor car.

The picture shows a really tall pole with a flag blowing in the breeze. It may well have been an important day, like the anniversary of a Coronation, for example.

The camera was probably mounted on a tripod and the exposure for the film probably took several seconds. That is why the end of the flag appears blurred because it was moving while the shutter was open. The adults and children would have been told to stand still to avoid being blurred themselves while the picture was being taken.

Notice that the roof-line of the first house behind the flag pole is just like that today. Fortunately few features have changed in the village.



The Motor-car. Sydney was quite a wealthy man and had his own motor car, probably from the first years that he lived in the village. In those days a motor car was a very rare sight on any road, especially in the countryside.

He was one of the first people in Norfolk to privately own his own car. The only other people who drove cars were mainly company 'reps' whose firm had bought it for them.

The year is 1912 or earlier. In this enlargement we see Sydney sitting in the car which is standing outside the house.

William (Sydney's father) is seen standing in the garden. He died in 1912 and was buried in the churchyard at Rockland All Saints.

The House



The Prockter Children, probably 1917. Sydney and Annie had come to the village shortly after getting married in 1902. They started a family, Their first child was called Colin. Quite soon the family was enlarged, with Basil, Muriel, Claude and Stella. The family lived in the house which still stands to the left of the shop, as you look at it from the road. All the children were born in that house. There was at least one maid working there and another one looking after the children.

In the photo, taken at the rear of their home, we see probably Basil with a dog, Muriel on the rocking horse, Claude on the swing and Stella, the baby, in a really antiquated push-chair. The tall girl is probably the 'Nanny' who looked after the children while their mother worked in the shop. Finally a maid, herself probably only about 14 years old. The eldest son, Colin, is the only child missing from the photo.

The House



Photo of the whole Prockter Family, probably in 1917. Sydney Prockter remained at the shop, with his wife and family of five children, until 1919.

Here is the whole family. The photo was taken at the back of the house. They all seem dressed in their 'Sunday best' clothes. Perhaps they dressed up specially for the photo or maybe they had just been to a special event. It is unlikely that the photo was taken on a Sunday since this highly posed family group was almost certainly set up by a professional photographer who is unlikely to have worked on a Sunday.

The names (left to right) are: Claude (my father), on the rocking horse; Stella, being held; Annie (Mrs Prockter); Colin; Mr Sidney Prockter; Muriel on the swing; and Basil. Claude was by father and the other children were my aunts and uncles. Stella was the last to die. She passed away in 2009.

The Village School



The Village School in 1975. Unlike many villages these days, Rocklands still has a thriving primary school. Sydney's five children all attended the school. At the age of eleven they were sent to the secondary school, which was at Great Ellingham in those days.

The picture of the school was taken in the 1975 but the buildings from the outside have changed little since then or even since the days of the Prockters, around 1915!

Group photos are probably still being taken. The class in which my father was a pupil is shown below.



School Photo, probably taken in 1916. The children standing on the back row look older than those sitting at the front. The 23 children may all be from the same class or, more likely, be from several classes, or even have been taught in one class, all together.

Claude Prockter (my father) is on the front row, second from the right-hand end. He looks about six years old, which was in 1916. He is not that well dressed when compared with some of the other children. Several of the boys on the back row, and even the boy next to him, have smart large collars and ties. The two tall girls on the back row have ribbons in their hair and another is wearing a long necklace which was fashionable at the time. They may have worn their best clothes, knowing they would be photographed at school that day. At least they are all looking at the camera. They may have had to keep still for several seconds.

All Saints Church



View of the church from near the gateway to the churchyard

The parish church is situated, not in the village, but on a short rise of land well outside, surrounded by fields. The tower is Norman, making it at least eight or nine hundred years old, although other parts of the building are of a later date.

Sydney was always a keen church-goer. He became a churchwarden at All Saints. Every Sunday the whole family attended the parish church.

Whether Sydney ever helped ring the peal of bells is not known but it is a grand sound to hear them ring out across the countryside.

His wife, Annie, a wonderful pianist and musician, used to play the hand-pumped organ.

The five children were all christened at the font in the church.

One elderly villager, Mrs Saunders, remembered that the Prockters could be seen walking from the shop, along a footpath across the fields, to attend the church on a Sunday. On one occasion she said "When we saw them starting off for church, we knew it was time for us to follow".



All Saints Church

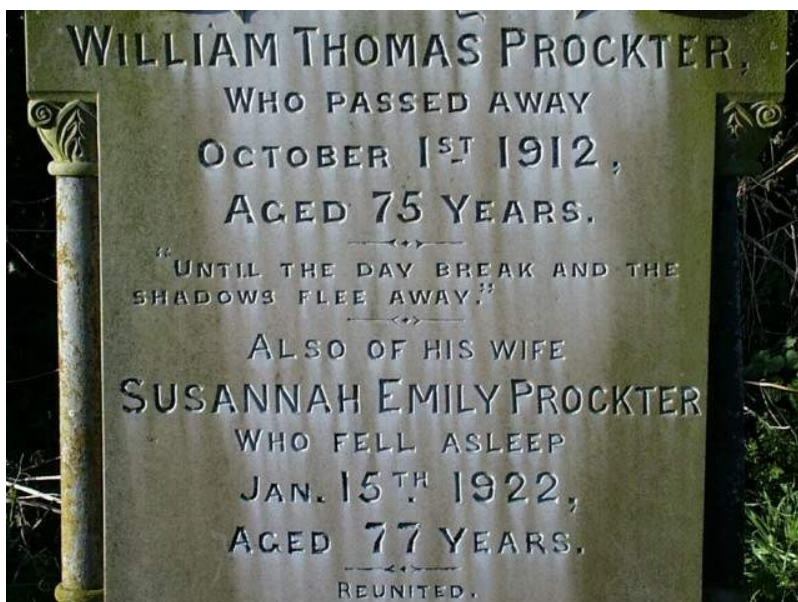


View of the church from the SW corner of the churchyard, near William Prockter's grave

When Sydney moved up to Norfolk from London, he brought his father and mother to live with him, in the village. They were called William and Susannah Prockter and were already quite elderly. William and his wife Susannah lived next door to the shop, in the small red-brick house to the right of the shop (as seen from the road).

William died in 1912, aged 75, and was buried in the churchyard, in the far SW corner.

His wife died in 1922, aged 77. By then the Prockters had moved to Norwich so her body was brought back to Rocklands to be buried in the same grave as her husband.



Prockter gravestone. If you visit the churchyard, the head-stone to William and Susannah can still be seen. They were my great grandparents.

The stone is at the far corner, on the west side of the church, right beside the road and immediately in front of the boundary hedge.

For all the years that it has stood there, the words are as legible as the day that they were cut.

Final Comments

When trying to find out about your family's past, who could wish for anything better than to visit a village where one of the residents actually remembered your grandfather?

That was what happened to me and it certainly added a new dimension to my interest in family history. To arrive in a village where a resident remembered back to the days of the First World War and even remembered a shopkeeper, who was my grandfather, was for me a magic moment when time seemed to have stood still for almost a century.

A few years ago I decided to travel up on Christmas eve for the late night service in the little church. The first time was 1983. It was always a special occasion. Because the church is not connected to mains electricity, the interior is lit using several oil-lamps along with many hundreds of household candles. The effect is quite delightful and, with a usually packed church, it is quite an event in itself.



The scene inside the church, before the service began, Christmas Eve December 2000

Final Comments

Imagine my surprise when, on entering the church, the locals said “We have kept your pew empty for you.” It turned out to be the third pew back on the pulpit side. It was where the Prockters - my grandfather, his wife Annie and their five children - used to sit all those years ago.

How many people have the great joy and privilege of returning to their roots after 60 or more years and finding they are directly in touch with their ancestors !



The Prockters sat in the third pew back from the pulpit.
The church is decorated for the Christmas services

Final Comments

The peaceful, country view across the fields to the tower of All Saints, on the left, and the derelict, crumbling tower from a previous church, on the right, remains unchanged today. Since no road surfaces are visible in this view, it is a scene which has changed little in several centuries.

It was a view that the Prockters no doubt knew very well, although they would have approached the church by walking across the fields from the village. Their view would therefore have been from a point to the left of this one.

Because the church is so remote, and bearing in mind that it is still not connected to mains electricity or gas, the sense of the past hangs strongly around the building even now. It is as if the church remains to remind us of the past when the rest of the village is busy getting on with the 21st century.

Here is one corner of Norfolk which is still deeply rooted in the 19th and 20th centuries, while it lives in the 21st century. Long may it continue !



All Saints church is to the left of the view with the old tower on the right

The information in this magazine has been assembled over many years. Many people have given me assistance, for which I offer my sincere thanks.

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Version 5 - June 2016

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Published by London Reference Books,
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London SE23 2QR.

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