

**Review of Luxmoore Book**  
*Wednesday, 14 December 2022*

KENNETH HILLIER'S LITERARY ABSTRACTS

<https://kennethhillier.blogspot.com/2022/12/ian-pyketts-life-and-times-of-revd-john.html?m=1>

The author is a little too self-effacing in his Preface. 'I am no historian...but I have discovered that I share my new-found amateur enthusiasm for such matters with many Victorians'...and, when comparing his efforts with 19thc local chroniclers - such as Llewellyn Jewitt (1816-1886), Revd John Cox (1843-1910) and the father-and-son duo Thomas Brushfield (1798-1875) and Thomas Nadauld Brushfield (1828-1910) - writes 'how shallow is the research I have undertaken myself'.

Ian Pykett is at his best researching narrower fields, as in the Chapters on the renovation of Holy Trinity at Ashford; the building of a new Vicarage (which he himself lived in); and an account of the late 19th century village. The Renovation is usefully framed within the national changes taking place in Victorian church architecture. 'One persistent driver within the 19th century Anglican church...was the high church Oxford Movement's desire to counter the rise of Nonconformism...medieval architectural styles that were being revived across the western world at the time were appropriated by the Established Church in support of its ambition to reinforce its continuity with its pre-Reformation Catholic past', viz. the early 'gothic revival' style. Pykett explains both the metaphorical and sacramental phases. 'Against this backdrop of a vigorous, albeit turbulent, architectural revival following three centuries' worth of neglect of England's churches and cathedrals, the Victorian restoration movement gathered steam; it is estimated that around 80% of all Church of England churches were affected in some way, from minor repairs to complete demolition and rebuilding.' Thus, at Ashford only the tower, the tower arch, and the three 16th century arches and octagonal pillars separating the nave from the north aisle remained untouched.

This meaty and fascinating chapter is followed by a shorter one on the building of a new vicarage in 1853, to initial pen and ink sketches by Joseph Paxton (he of the later Crystal Palace fame). Three storeys

high, with large rooms, high ceilings, cast-iron window frames and an exposed site on a hillside ( an indoor water closet was only added later) it was difficult to heat and repair. Perhaps it was the alleged presence of 'Jennifer the Poltergeist', that led it to being finally sold in 2002. It was merely the start of a mass exodus of clergy from such vicarages during the 20th century – hence so many 'The Old Vicarage' signs seen in the villages and towns of today.

Ian Pykett is equally good when describing the village of Ashford in Revd Luxmoore's time. The main industry was the marble trade: villagers were employed in mining and cutting, turning and polishing, and decorating the marble. Ashford was essentially self-sufficient – most of the trades, labour and skills could be found in the village, nearby settlements or the town of Bakewell. There were domestic workers, shopkeepers, gardeners and grooms as well as a carpenter, blacksmith and wheelwright. Of course, there were times of hardship and soup kitchens were one answer. Sanitary arrangements were basic – exterior dry-earth toilets were commonplace. Visitations of smallpox and typhoid were in addition to pleurisy and tuberculosis.

The Appendix by David Windle, on the history of the Dissenting Chapels in Ashford is also a model of local history research and narration. The Baptist Chapel on Ashford Lane opened in 1761 but has been 'swept away long ago' – a small cemetery, with ivy-coloured graves is all that remains of the cause. A Presbyterian Chapel (Cliff End), opened in 1701, was acquired by the Congregational Church at Bakewell in 1870, but came to a sudden end in 1937 when the roof collapsed – a steady stream of heavy quarry traffic had not helped. Wesleyan Methodism was founded in the village in the late 1820s, using an adapted building in Court Lane. A new chapel was opened in 1899 but falling numbers led to its closure in 1994.

A major problem for any Historian, amateur or otherwise, is a natural desire – after all the hard work ploughed into their research – to put everything he or she has found into the subsequent book. One entirely empathises with Pykett's comment, 'As I began to discover the facts about John Reddaway Luxmoore's life, it became impossible for me to divorce them from the context of the social transformations of the Victorian and Edwardian eras'. Hence the 'Life and Times' of his book. However, his long chapter II – which encompasses half the length of his work – needed to be severely pruned. The Revd John Reddaway Luxmoore is the most important thread in the narrative, but he is too often obscured by extraneous topics, whether of other individuals or

only mildly relevant events. The information about Devon and John's family ('we'll call him 'our' John to differentiate him from many other John Luxmoores', says Pykett) are so detailed as to confuse the reader. Many of these passages are intrinsically of interest, but they impede the more straightforward account of John's actual life and career – his birth; his education with Rev Feild and St Bees Theological College; his first clerical appointments at Smalley in Derbyshire and Ross-on-Wye; his marriage to Rosalie Stonhouse-Vigor; and his arrival in Ashford. The controversy over the 'free-thinker' Richard Nadault Brushfield's tablet – Luxmoore refused to accommodate it in his church – is a good example of what should be in the Chapter.

The Luxmoores had six children, one boy dying only a few months old. All three girls died unmarried, as did the eldest son 'Johnny'. Both the latter and the youngest child, William Cyril, followed their father into the Anglican ministry. William did not marry until aged 49. His eldest son Christopher also entered the priesthood, ending as Assistant Bishop in Chichester. Only the younger son, Robin Stonhouse Luxmoore, broke away from the cloth, to work on a ranch in the USA and oil exploration in the Arctic.

Ian Pykett should be congratulated on his book – there is so much in it of interest, and it is a revealing snapshot of a late Victorian/Edwardian country vicar wrestling with the issues of his times. The virtual rebuilding of his church is an apt example of what was going on elsewhere and is a useful aid for the more general historian of the Church of England. This reviewer has nothing but admiration for the enthusiasm and dedication of such amateur historians.

*Kenneth Hillier*

*Kings Newton, Melbourne, Derbyshire*

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