

JAMES NANCE. Rector 1895-1905.

James Trengrove Nance was born in April 1852, the son of a surgeon. He was educated at Winchester and St John's College, Oxford. He remained at the college as a fellow, then a lecturer and was appointed Dean of Arts in 1878, at the age of 26.

It was in 1886 that he began his long career as a clergyman, going first to the parish of Polstead, in Essex. St John's College is patron of many parishes, with the right to appoint the Rector. One of these is East Farndon, and it was in 1895 that James Nance came to the Harborough area, as Rector of East Farndon.

He arrived here with his wife Mary, whom he had married in 1887, and together they made a profound impression on the village and the surrounding area. They had no children and devoted their energies to their parish, showing remarkable generosity and hospitality, and to the cause of Temperance, to which they were clearly passionately committed.

Temperance – abstinence from alcohol, or at least moderation in its use – was one of the great moral crusades of many men and women in the Victorian and Edwardian periods. For Anglicans, the Church of England Temperance Society (CETS) and the Band of Hope were the main driving forces. The Band of Hope was for children, with the aim of persuading them to a life-long pledge to abstain from alcohol. The most committed CETS members would sign up to be 'total abstainers'.

James and Mary Nance moved into East Farndon Rectory in the early spring of 1895. They remained there until the end of 1905, when they moved on to another parish in Essex. Their involvement in all aspects of community life is clear from the columns of the *Market Harborough Advertiser*. James was regularly present at the Parish Meeting. In May 1896, for example, he is involved in what must have been a heated debate about the diameter of pipes to be used for channelling water within the village. He was the person chiefly responsible for the running of the village school. In 1902 an Act of Parliament transferred the school to a board of managers, and James became one of this group.

He gave lectures in Harborough. In December 1895 he spoke at the National School in the town on 'Church Principles'. He gave other lectures in the town, including 'Puritanism' and 'Modern Greece and Crete'. He gave an address during the Good Friday services in Harborough Parish Church.

James and Mary entertained their parishioners frequently and generously, it seems. As part of Farndon 'Feast' (as the fete was then known) there was 'tea and a social gathering' at the Rectory (admission 6d). Forty people sat down to tea in the garden. "Dancing was enjoyed on the lawn, which was lit up with lanterns". Adult choir members were entertained to supper by the Rector in January 1897 and the children were given tea the following week. Sometimes groups from other villages and towns were invited to the village. In July 1900 a meeting of the Sunday School

Teachers' union saw 50 people having tea on the Rectory lawn. This was repeated with 60-70 present in 1903.

However the Nances' greatest efforts, as shown by the newspaper reports of the time, were directed towards the cause of Temperance. Within a year of their arrival in East Farndon, in January 1896, a branch of the Church of England Temperance Society was set up in the village. Mrs Nance had already been training the village children in singing temperance songs and several were sung at the inaugural meeting. Twenty-seven children joined the Band of Hope at that first meeting and 17 adults joined the CETS, 14 of them in the Total Abstinence section.

Regular meetings were held, usually with a talk, but also with entertainment in the form of songs and recitations, with a temperance slant. Membership grew. In early 1898, CETS membership in the village was said to be 98. The population of the village in the 1901 census was 204. These figures are an extraordinary testimony to the energy and enthusiasm of the Nances. The number of members did decline from this initial burst but remained above 40 till the Nances left in 1905.

James and Mary Nance attended CETS meetings in Market Harborough and Mary hosted a meeting of the Harborough branch of the British Women's Temperance Society at the Rectory in the summer of 1899, with the usual tea on the lawn. Only two weeks later there was a joint meeting of the village CETS with the Railway Temperance Association of Market Harborough at the Rectory – with tea on the lawn.

At that period, the Diocese of Peterborough used to set examinations which Band of Hope children could take. The success of Farndon children highlights perhaps more dramatically than any other report the extreme effect the Nances had on the village. For example, the Harborough Advertiser tells us in May 1900, that there were 8 successful candidates in the Diocese, of whom 5 were from East Farndon. Similarly, in 1904, 3 of the best 4 papers in the Diocese were by Farndon children.

The Nances campaigned for pubs to be closed on Sundays and organised a petition from the village. The Bishop of Leicester came to the village to chair a meeting on the subject. Mary Nance gave talks at various places in the diocese, explaining the work of the Eastern Counties Home for Inebriates.

The Nances also arranged talks on spreading the gospel. A number of people involved in missionary work came to speak in the village. A speaker in October 1898 related "how keen his Hindoo boys were in acquiring biblical knowledge". A speaker from New Zealand in July 1905 reported that the Maoris turned from "bloodthirsty savages into peaceful Christians".

However, temperance was the Nances' main concern. Their farewell services and meetings as they prepared to leave for Essex in late 1905 refer to temperance most prominently. From the pulpit James told his parishioners that in Cranham, "I shall

find a larger sphere of parochial work...my wife and I expect to find there full scope for our energies in the Temperance cause.”

At their final CETS meeting in the village, James is reported as saying that their work of encouraging temperance “had succeeded in a wonderful way and he hoped that many of the children who had passed under their hands would be thoroughly imbued with temperance principles throughout their lives”.

The impression gained from local newspaper reports is that Rev Nance’s hopes were probably not realised. After 1905 and the Nances’ departure, there are no more references to the CETS or the Band of Hope. Temperance, it seems, was a tender plant. Without the Nances to tend it, it withered.

James and Mary only stayed in Cranham for three years before returning to the East Midlands. James was appointed Vicar of St Mary’s, Leicester. He was made a canon in 1911. It was while they were here in 1915 that Mary died, at the age of 56. The Leicester Mercury account of her death is as follows: “since then [October 11th] she had kept in bed, and had a nurse to attend to her. Her complaint appeared to be a nervous breakdown. Yesterday, shortly after four o’clock, Canon Nance was in the room with his wife, and about two minutes after he had left the room, he was informed that she had fallen out of the window. He went into the small yard under the window and saw her lying unconscious. She died about seven the same evening”. It certainly sounds like suicide and makes one wonder what had happened to the dynamic couple of only a few years before.

Interestingly, the funeral took place at East Farndon, which they had left ten years earlier – presumably it held happy memories of their successes there. She was buried in Farndon churchyard. James arranged for a new window in the church, dedicated to her memory.



James moved in 1916 to Wheathampstead, Hertfordshire, and then in 1921 to Peakirk, Northamptonshire. He continued as Rector there till 1932, by which time he was eighty years old.

He died in 1942, 90 years of age, and was buried with his wife in East Farndon churchyard.



It would be interesting to know more about the couple's time in Cranham and Leicester – did they continue with their temperance work? What pressures led to Mary's death? What sort of mark did James make in his later positions? Maybe

further information will come to light, to tell us more of these energetic crusaders who were so passionate in the struggle against the Demon Drink.

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