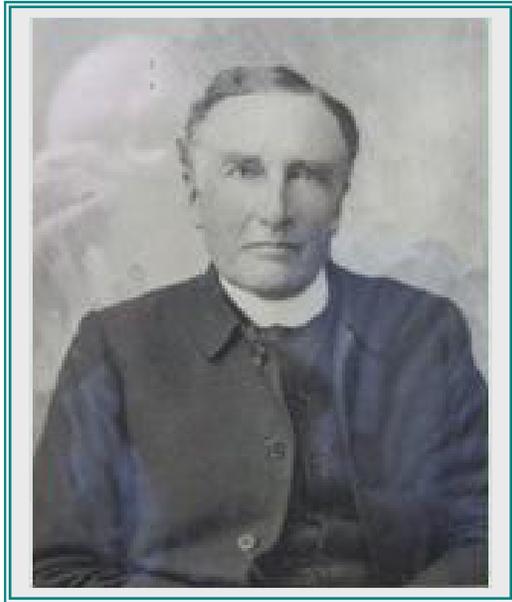


## An Introduction to the Rev Stanley Percival's Letters to His Parishioners

Text: David Gibbs

Amongst my collection of old documents and letters, I have pages torn from a larger bound volume of the Merriott Parish Magazine. The pages I have are copies of letters written by the Rev Stanley Edward Percival MA, the vicar of Merriott from November



1887 to September 1936, to his parishioners. The letters were published each month throughout the year of 1891 and 1892 and are published here as two archives, one for each year. (Note that there are some gaps in each sequence of letters.) There are also two quarterly statements for the year 1896, published as here as a separate document.

As you would expect, each letter usually contains a religious element where Stanley puts forward with considerable skill his interpretation of the scriptures and their relation to everyday living, but they also make reference to other matters ranging from church finance, smallpox, poverty, charity, temperance, thrift, drunkenness, foul language, child behavior and so on.

At the foot of each letter there is a summary of the baptisms, marriages and burials conducted during the preceding month. Older village residents of today will recognise many of the names. Indeed, they themselves may have been baptised by the Rev Percival later on in the years leading up to 1936, thus maintaining to this day a link with his ministry.



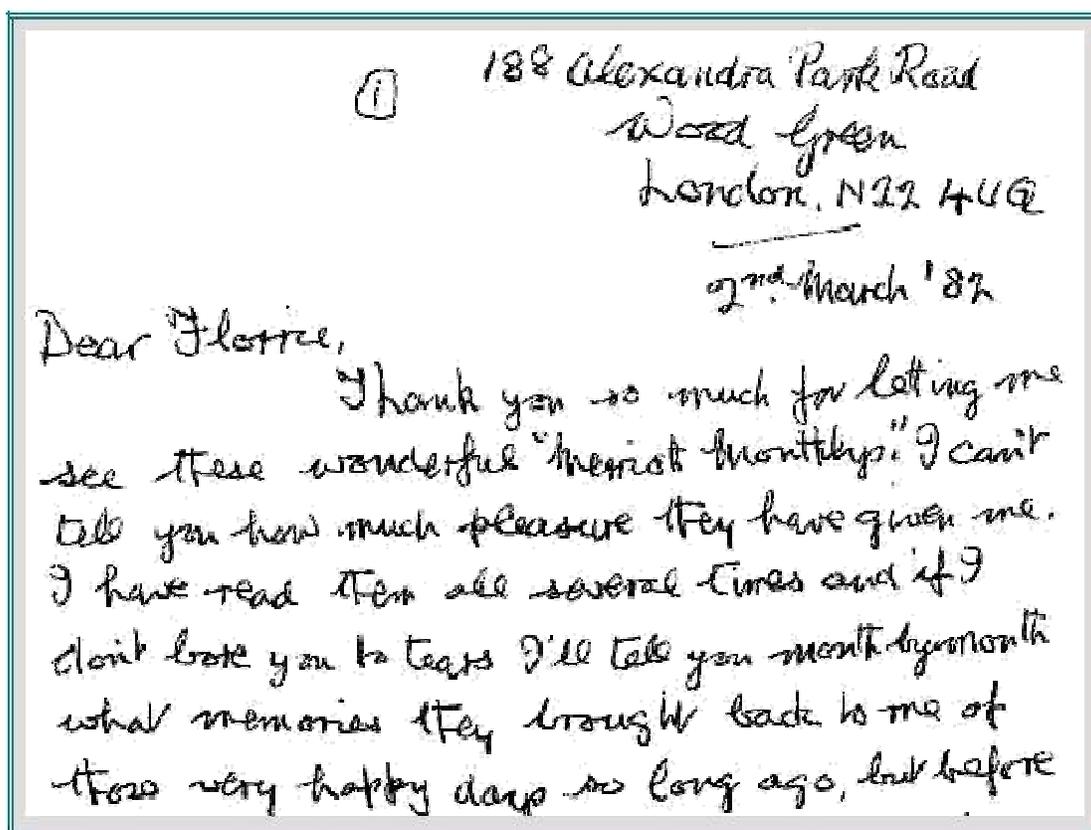
And there is an added bonus, provided via the pen of my cousin, Edward (Ed) Mitchell (left). Of my paternal grandmother's sixteen grandchildren, Ed was the firstborn, I was the last. Ed was born in 1905. I was born some 29 years later, by which time



he had left the village to become a schoolteacher, eventually the head teacher of a North London school.

My older sister Florrie (above right) and Ed exchanged correspondence from time to time, particularly in their latter years, and in 1982 it appears that Florrie sent him copies of the 1892 Merriott Parish Magazine pages. He was clearly delighted to

see them and even though he was by now getting on in years and his sight was very poor, he wrote a ten-page letter in response. This is how he began his letter:



188 Alexandra Park Road  
Wood Green  
London, N22 4UG  
2<sup>nd</sup> March '92

Dear Florence,

I thank you so much for letting me see these wonderful "Merrie Montlys". I can't tell you how much pleasure they have given me. I have read them all several times and if I don't bore you to tears I'll tell you month by month what memories they brought back to me of those very happy days so long ago, but before

Fortunately, my sister filed Ed's letter with the Rev Percival's letters and so we now have the benefit not only of the writings of the vicar recording church affairs of over 120 years ago but also a snapshot of village life some 25 years later when Ed was a youngster. The letters, together with relevant sections from Ed's letter, are included in this archive. I'm sure you will find them fascinating.

The *Reverend Percival Letters* archive consists of four documents:

- RP\_01 This document*
- RP\_02 Letters for the year 1891*
- RP\_03 Letters for the year 1892*
- RP-04 Quarterly Statements for the year 1896*

To access a document, return to the *Reverend Percival Letters* sub-folder and double click on the document number/title.