

## **FOULSHAM AND HINGHAM ENGLAND**

**1973-1983 Ralph Folsom McBride**

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*(Copied from Folsom Family Association of America, Inc., 1983 Annual Report)*

As we planned for our trip to Europe in 1973, we decided that we would go wherever we wanted and stay as long as we wished in any place, with no fixed schedule and no reservations made long in advance. Among the places we wanted to visit were the ancestral homes of the Folsom family.

According to all the records we had been able to find, John Folsom and his ancestors for several generations had been residents of Hingham in Norfolk, England. But many family researchers seemed to feel that in years past, there had been a connection of the family with the nearby town of Foulsham, pronounced in modern English as "Folsom." This idea we thought was worth exploring.

Sometime after our arrival in England, we rented a car and began roaming the country-side. During the third week of April we checked into the Abbey Hotel in Wymondham — the nearest town of good size to our destination of Hingham and Foulsham. Yes, the hotel manager said, he knew of Hingham — he had never been there, but it was northwest, and he thought the road fairly good. Foulsham — he had never heard of, nor had any of the staff. We showed him the location on our road map, and were told that the roads between Hingham and Foulsham would be narrow and we would go from small village to small village.

We started out the next morning with a full gas tank so that if we got lost — which we expected to do after the hotel manager's predictions — we would at least be able to drive over most of northwest Norfolk. We found Hingham without trouble. We easily located the church from directions given by someone we stopped at the Market Place near the center of town.

The present church of St. Andrew, we learned, had been built in the fourteenth century during the time that Remiguis de Hethersette was Rector of the Parish (1316-1359). From the changes in architectural styles which could be noted in the structure, it can be assumed that the building at that time was begun at the west end of an earlier and smaller church and that later a tower and east end was added to the structure as the style of that was the Perpendicular style common at a later date. Today, entrance to the church is through the porch built at a later date on the south side. In looking down the center aisle to the altar, we noticed first the glass window above it. We learned that the stained glass in the lights of the window was given to the church in 1813, and that the present altar rails were given as memorials to the men of Hingham who died in World War II.

There are many other memorials in the church, but only three will be mentioned here. The first of these is a framed piece of wood. It is part of the

wood used in the construction of the "Old Ship" church of Hingham, Massachusetts, and was sent to St. Andrews by Mr. Jack Feltham of New York. Mr. Feltham had been born in Hingham, England, and had moved to the States. The second memorial also has American ties. It is a bust of President Abraham Lincoln whose ancestor, Samuel Lincoln, left Hingham, England, in 1637, going to Massachusetts with other members of this congregation. The Lincolns had been residents in the St. Andrew Parish for many generations.

The third memorial is the most ornate of those in the Church; It is the Morley tomb. This very large marble was erected to the memory of Sir Thomas, Lord Morley, after his death in 1435. His family had been the owners of the land on which Hingham and Foulsham are located since the fourteenth century, and his maternal ancestors had held the area since it was granted to them by King Stephen circa 1140.

There was no memorial to the Folsoms or Gilmans.

Unfortunately, we could not locate the Rector of St. Andrews as he was visiting members of the Parish who lived on the nearby farms, and therefore we could not see the Parish Register. In 1983, we found a copy of the Register in the library at Norwich, and later saw a much clearer copy at the home of Miss Mary Lonsdale, historian of the Society of the Friends of St. Andrews.

When we could find no gravestones for Foulshams in the church yard in 1973, we turned our attention to driving to the village of Foulsham. Just as the hotel manager had predicted, we made many wrong turns and got lost several times. An hour and a half after we left Hingham, we felt sure we were approaching Foulsham for we could see the tower of a church. Upon meeting a man walking along the road, we stopped to be reassured. He confirmed that the church tower was that of the Holy Innocents in Foulsham. He told us that we had a mile to go along the road. And he gave us the sad news that the church tower was in such poor repair that we would find the church closed. He directed us to the Rectory which we would find located on the right side of the road at the village green, and added an invitation to come to his home across from this for morning coffee when we had visited with the Rector.

We found that the Reverend A. N. Ainsworth was "at one of his other parishes," and that it would be late afternoon before he returned. Mrs. Ainsworth added that she knew of Folsoms in America — Reverend Ainsworth corresponded with several. And, as she served us coffee, she said that she was surprised at how many of these came to Foulsham as the Rector had found none of that name in the town or Holy Innocents records. She was uncertain as to the date that each of these began.

We left very soon to look at the church yard. As soon as we stopped the car, two interested ladies living across the street came to join us. No, they could not let us into the church, but they would tell us about it as we walked

about the building. The present church, they said, had been built after a fire burned most of the village in 1770 and damaged the church. In size it is the same as the earlier church. They told us that much of the stained glass had been destroyed in the fire, and that the clock, of which they seemed very proud, no longer worked. They were emphatic that there were no Folsoms or any variant of the spelling of the name, in the churchyard. We thanked the ladies, and returned to the car.

We continued in our efforts to learn about English Foulshams in the Wymondham library where we found two or three books in which the town was mentioned. A copy of the Domesday Survey contained the name of such a town in Norfolk — and added the information that this area was "crown" land. In 1086, all England was crown land unless King William had confirmed it to the person who was owner at the time of the Conquest or had bestowed it upon one of his followers from Normandy or England.

After our return to the States, though our research on Folsoms was devoted primarily to establishing the correct descent for the southern branches of the family and especially the Choctaw branch as Ralph was a descendant of Choctaw Chief David Folsom, we occasionally found a few gems concerning Foulshams in English records.

One such was the discovery of the seal designed for Benedict de Folsham on the order of King Edward III which is the basis for the logo of the Folsom Family of America. Research during our time in England in 1983 resulted in much more information concerning Benedict, but while his importance in English life was emphasized, we were not able to establish a connection between him and John Foulsham of Hingham and America.

But whether John had a connection to Foulsham, England, or not, we were most happy to accept the invitation of the Parish of the Holy Innocents as extended by their Rector, the Reverend J. M. S. Pickering, to attend a Gala Week in the Parish June 5 through 12, 1983.

From the Fall, 1983, issue of the "Folsom Bulletin" you know of our efforts to have other members of the Association join with us in making the trip. We are sorry that more of you could not go. Polly and Randall Paine have told us that they thoroughly enjoyed the six days they spent with the Parish. For the McBrides, it was eight momentous days which we will always treasure.

Early Saturday afternoon, June 4, the Reverend Pickering came to our hotel in Norwich to drive us to Foulsham. (We had spent five weeks in England previous to this, the last in Norwich.) The route from the Norfolk county seat was an entirely new one to us, and as on this trip we did not have to watch for road signs, it was a much more enjoyable and much quicker trip than the one we had made to Foulsham in 1973. Michael Pickering did not get lost even once!

Arriving in Foulsham, he slowed so that we could see the many changes along the Norwich to Hindolveston road which forms the main street of the village. Michael serves three parishes as Rector. This Saturday afternoon was Fete Day at Hindolveston. The celebration there was opened soon after our arrival by the representative of Lord Hastings — the largest land owner of the area.

At the Parish of the Holy Innocents, Gala Week began Sunday morning with the service of Morning Prayer. When we entered the Church, we found it beautifully decorated. The end of each pew was ornamented with a small basket of fresh flowers. The Baptismal Font, a marvel of wood carving, was surrounded by arrangements of flowers denoting the products of the dairying industry — an oblong of yellow flowers symbolized butter, a flowing arrangement of tiny white flowers denoted milk, and other arrangements were symbolic of various cheeses. Other industries of this area of Norfolk were depicted in flower arrangements, also.

Around the window at the left side of the choir was the one celebrating the importance of the wool industry. Featured were a spinning wheel, a sheepskin, and the tools used in the sheering of sheep intermixed with baskets of lilies and other flowers. On the right side of the altar was the decoration denoting the fishing industry. Here were two large anchors, five to six feet high, made of wheat straw, the material from which so many ornaments were woven for the Harvest festivals of 1980-82. Such sculptures are called "corn dollies" and were commented on by the press and broadcast media of Norfolk and London, and these items were undoubtedly one of the reasons the Parish had been so successful in raising money to repair the church in those years. Other areas of the Church were decorated with massive floral arrangements which were renewed all week. The arrangements were just as breath-taking on Sunday June 12 as they had been on June 5. And when we took the commentator for Radio Norfolk to see them on the afternoon of June 8, he was as impressed as we with their beauty.

During the service of Morning Prayer, we were welcomed to the Parish by the Reverend Pickering, and most of the congregation waited on the walk at the close of the service so that they could add their individual greetings.

Following the church service we listened to the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) account of the forth-coming events of the Foulsham Gala Week and the announcement that the "Americans had arrived safely" and were enjoying Foulsham. The traditional "morning coffee" we were having at this time was the first of the many hours we spent in the homes of Parish members. Each day during our stay, we had morning coffee, lunch, tea, or dinner with a resident of Foulsham. In between, when not participating in events of Gala Week, we were taken to see places of interest to us. Both the Paines and the McBrides stayed at the Rectory with the Pickerings.

The bright sun of Sunday morning had disappeared by the end of lunch as the fog and cold blew in from the North Sea twenty miles away. We put on wraps and walked to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Dennis Jones for the "Teddy Bears' Picnic" and the choosing of Miss Foulsham. Many people were already there, and while we were introduced, we watched children of the village engaged in various games near the rear of the garden.

Following these introductions, Ralph learned that he was to be the judge of the "Miss Foulsham" contest. Fortunately, Mr. Jones guided us quickly to waiting chairs, and he and Mr. Colin Brown, the Church Warden, turned deaf ears to Ralph's many protests. As the cold was becoming more severe, it was decided to proceed with the judging as the "garden party" dresses of the contestants did not offer them much protection against the 50° weather. All were very attractive as they walked around the inner garden, but Ralph thought one displayed more poise than the others, so this was his choice. Ralph describes her as a typical "English Beauty" who had reddish blond hair and blue eyes.

Shortly after the crowning of the Queen, the Paines arrived from London and Norwich, and soon after, the photographer from the Dereham newspaper — this paper has the largest circulation in Norfolk outside of Norwich. The four Americans and Miss Foulsham accompanied him to the town sign where the pictures were made for the next edition of the newspaper.

Monday morning was the time for a walk through Foulsham to talk to some of the residents whose families had lived here for two or more generations. During this walk we became aware of more and more changes that had taken place since we were there in 1973. The new Rectory had been built in the garden of the second Rectory, the one in which the Reverend and Mrs. Ains-worth lived in 1973. This second Rectory was now undergoing extensive remodeling. Michael Pickering told us that this had been purchased by a businessman who would soon retire, and had chosen Foulsham because he wanted to live in a country village not too far from Norwich.

As we continued on the Hindolveston-Norwich road, we found the bank building empty, and were told that the bank had closed about five years before. Also, the food store across the street had recently closed, though a new owner had tried to operate it for about six months after buying and refurbishing the building and the adjoining living quarters. The remaining grocery store was a small outlet of the Spar chain of mini-super markets and carried vegetables and fruit as well as canned goods. Fresh meat had to be purchased at the butcher further along the road toward Norwich. The draper or clothing store is in the vicinity of this latter shop with the post office in a shop nearer the Spar. In addition to these, there is a barbershop, a garage, and one Pub (in previous years there had been several), the only place to "eat out" in Foulsham except on week-ends when a fish-and-chips shop located a half block away serves as the gathering place for the younger people of the area.

Housing was changing also. In addition to the several houses which were occupied by descendents of families who had previously lived there, and those which had been bought and remodeled by people new to Foulsham, there were a number of new houses. Some of these were built for the occupants or had been bought by the current owners from builders, and others were "Council Houses." These are compact, modern houses built by town councils throughout England and sold or rented to elderly people so that they may have easily kept and energy-efficient housing. We had our morning coffee with a Parish member whose family had been in Foulsham for at least three generations, and who was enjoying her only small easily kept home. Here as with many of this type housing we saw in several towns, there was a garden plot so that the resident could continue with the English passion for growing things.

After lunch in the Pub, we went to the Village School. This was located in the building of the former private school for girls, now owned by the Town. In addition to the school rooms, there was a walled garden area and a large playing field to the rear — but no playground equipment that is thought so essential in American schools. When we arrived, we found the youngest group of children in the garden where each was tending his own small plot with rake or hoe or on knees removing weeds. This was the "infants class" and seemed to include the children who would be in American kindergarten and first grade. We went to their classroom with them, and they asked us many questions about schools in the States.

In addition to this group, there were children in grades 2, 3, 4, and 5. The older children were bussed to school in the larger village of Reepham about 15 miles away. At the Foulsham school there were three teachers and the head mistress who now teaches full time because the enrollment has decreased. Some years ago, when the school had more pupils and all the village children attended the local school, Mr. Brown was headmaster in Foulsham rather than Reepham where he was in 1983.

Following our visit to the school, we returned to the Rectory and over tea we talked with the Pickerings about the changes we had seen, and learned from them that of the many changes that had occurred during the six years they had been in Foulsham, the change they were most happy about was the repair of the church. The present building of the Church of the Holy Innocents is a composite structure. The first church on the site is said to have been built in the 1480's by the Lord Morley of the time (a descendent of the Lord Morley whose tomb is in the Church of St. Andrew in Hingham). The title of Baron Morley was created by King Edward I, the grandfather of King Edward III who granted the seal to Benedict de Foulsham while the latter served as Butler to his household.

Apparently the original church was very similar to the present church as all accounts speak of the present church as having been "rebuilt" after the fire of 1770 which destroyed most of the buildings of the town and badly damaged the church. Today, the church is entered through the tower, though it may be that at one time it was entered from a porch on the south as is the church in Hingham, as today there is a room in that position which is used as a robing room for the choir.

The tower is approximately ninety feet high with pinnacles extending another ten feet according to figures given us. Both the tower itself and the pinnacles have numerous embellishments, and a clock set into the middle stage on the south side where it can be seen from the village. The church is unique among Norfolk churches in that it has clerestory windows in the chancel as well as the nave. The pews provide seating for about 150 people with the choir having a capacity of 24. The kneeling cushions are covered with needlepoint worked in ecclesiastical motifs. Some of the glass in the altar window is that originally in the church, and was saved when the building burned.

Tuesday afternoon was spent in sightseeing. The Paines went to Blickling Hall, at one time the home of the Howard Family, and the McBrides to see the Saxon Cathedral at North Elmham and the nearby Parish Church where Ralph's Frogge ancestors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are buried. On Wednesday, the four of us went to Sandringham House, the country home of Queen Elizabeth II which was opened to the public five years ago and can now be visited during several months each year. Thursday morning we were taken to Norwich by Mrs. Michael Dewing where we were interviewed over BBC radio. Our air time was spent answering questions as to facts about our home locations in the States and our reactions to England and particularly Norfolk. Mrs. Dewing told about the "Gala Week" and the Fete on Saturday which would be the final event.

It was Mrs. Dewing who had taught the Parish members to weave the marvelous wheat straw figures that were part of the Church decorations and which had been sold with so much success at the Harvest Festivals of the years before. A different type of wheat straw sculpture constructed with the bits of straw left from the weaving, was a three foot "horse," called the "Foulsham Horse" which stood in the entrance hall of the Rectory.

Late that afternoon when we arrived at the Church Hall, we found a number of people already there viewing the exhibits of old farm machinery, wool thread spinning and such. As the McBrides began to explain the posters containing the Annual Reports and pictures of the Folsom Association, we were soon the center of a small crowd. There was much interest in the Folsom Family in America and the Association, particularly among those who had come from the nearby villages. The pictures of the dedication of the new Memorial Stone to John and Mary Oilman Folsom elicited much comment from everyone.

On Saturday, the Paines left for London, and the McBrides spent the afternoon at the town athletic field, the site of the Fete. After a picture taking session, we found seats on the porch of the field house and watched a troupe of Morris Dancers perform. While we watched, we were brought containers from which to draw numbers for the many raffle prizes. Later we judged the various contests — picking the most "Beautiful Baby," the "Glamorous Granny," and the "Knobbiest Knees."

When we got up Sunday morning, we found that Michael Pickering had already left for Hindolveston. He would hold four services that day. The morning one at Holy Innocents, his second of the day, was Holy Communion. Someway, the flower decorating committee had found time during the Saturday activities to freshen each arrangement. There was not a wilted flower to be seen.

Sunday afternoon was devoted to a tea for the Senior Citizens. In addition to the dozen or so Seniors now living in Foulsham, a number from the nearby area had come, and several former residents — one from London. He had fought in World War II and now lived in the Chelsea Military Hospital in London. His bright red tunic was ornamented with his many medals. He was soon the center of a happy group of friends of earlier years.

The final event of Gala Week was a village-wide ecumenical service of Even Song at the Church of the Holy Innocents. The Baptist Minister read both lessons, and the Reverend Pickering made a short summary of Gala Week in his Homily. In this we were thanked for participating with the Village of Foulsham in their celebration,

At the close of the service, we stood outside the church with the two ministers and thanked each person for inviting us to Foulsham and for helping to make this week one we would always remember. Folsoms these people were not, but certainly they had made this a most glorious experience for their American guests.