

RECOLLECTIONS  
OF  
FINEDON  
IN THE  
EIGHTEEN-THIRTIES.

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BY AN OLD RESIDENT  
(JOSEPH HARLOCK. *b.*1820. *d.*1906)

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## Finedon in the Eighteen-Thirties.

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**I**N those days the village extended further West towards Queen's Cross. It was approached by a road past the Bell Inn, and on to the Long Meadow, which is now used as the Sewage Farm. With one exception the houses that comprised this part of the village have been demolished. "The Cottage," alone, was allowed to remain. It was then used as the Dower House to the Hall and was occupied by members of the Dolben family. It has since been converted into two cottages, which are occupied by some of the Staff employed at The Hall.

The Bell Inn was a plain farmhouse. The porch and ornamental appendages have been added since. The effigy of Queen Edith, replaces a painting of her which had the accompanying couplet underneath:—

"Queen Edith, Lady, once of Finedon,  
Where at The Bell good fare is dined on."

In close vicinity to the Inn was the Coronation Pole, a memorial of the coronation of George IV.

(1820). On the top was a crown painted in the royal colours. The pole was used to create sport at holiday times, when a leg of mutton was placed on the top. It was then well greased, and he who could swarm up it, and bring down the mutton, kept the trophy. Much fun was produced by the many futile attempts to reach the prize.

The open space opposite the Bell Inn, now known as Box-hedge Place, was then called Stocks Hill. Here stood the village Stocks, and also two insanitary cottages, with their pigstyes and manure heaps. There was also an open well, which when full overflowed into the brook, then an open channel, crossed only by a foot bridge. The Stocks were still in existence and adjacent to the Bell Inn. The power to use them was largely held by the Village Constable. They were frequently employed to repress freedom of speech and action, at the instigation of prejudice and tyranny. There were no police in those days.

Where cottages now stand at the bottom of Bell Hill was a Smithy and Wheelwright's Shop. Between this Smithy and Stanton's bakehouse property, was a barn-like building which was used as a Boys' Sunday School.

Passing up, what is now called Regent Street, is a cottage on the left hand side, bearing this

inscription over one of the dormer windows:—

“Richard Dent  
Built this tenement.”

His final resting place is marked by a stone let into the wall on the South side of the Church inscribed:—

“Here lieth Richard Dent  
In his last tenement.”  
1794.

The Wesleyan Chapel was built in 1822, but not in its present proportions. It has been enlarged several times. (Now in 1930 it is used as a Cinema).

On the opposite side of the street were two open wells, under the garden wall of the Manor House, now occupied by Mr. Donald.

Dolben Square was the site of the village horsepond which took up a great part of the space, only a footpath on one side and a narrow roadway on the other being left clear. It was a great achievement, as well as pleasure, to the young Hodges of that day to ride the fore horse of a team and pilot it several times round the pond. Water was supplied to the pond by springs rising in it and generally it was full to the overflow. Its greatest depth was  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 feet. Where the town pump stands was an open well. The water

was always running over, and was conveyed by a stream into the open brook. It was a delightful place for children who love to dabble in water. And where are the children who do not?

Mackworth Green was the site of a commodious farm Homestead, the dwelling house of which has been turned into cottages, which now front on to Dolben Square.

The ground upon which the Star Hall stands was the site of another farm Homestead. This had already been converted into cottages.

Passing up Well Street, there are fewer changes than in some other parts of the village. The brick houses are the most modern ones. The Prince of Wales public house stands on a piece of land which was formerly a Small-holding.

Rose Hill was the extremity of the village on the South side, and the East end of The Banks was its limit on the North side.

The Banks were covered with trees and undergrowth, and were a sort of no-man's-land. Who claimed them ultimately or redeemed them is not known, but a thriving builder erected the stone-built cottages (known as Birdcage Row) on part of the space.

On the opposite side of the street is the

Friends' Meeting House (built 1690) and Burial Ground.

Placketts' Yard was a farm Homestead, owned and occupied by a person bearing that name. This family has become extinct in the village. The name is now only known on a tomb-stone in the Churchyard.

The Gate was not an Inn (nor even a place where strong drinks were sold) until after the passing of the Beer-house Licenses' Bill.

The Workhouse and Lock-up—then called the Round House—occupied the site now known as Barker's Square.

The inmates were dirty and unkempt. There was no one with authority to care for or supervise them. The relief was badly administered. In these days there are numerous officials connected with the administration of Poor Law Relief. Both Ratepayers and Rate-receivers may congratulate themselves upon these changes. Compared with the past, they tend to cleanliness, comfort and economy.

The Chapel in High Street has a small endowment. It was one of the very early Nonconformist places of worship erected in the Midlands after the passing of the Toleration Act, 1689. (Now in 1930 the chapel has been pulled

down, and on the site a dwelling-house and shop have been built).

The Mulso Arms was then called The Shoe and Clog. The Smithy opposite was the centre at which the village worthies met to discuss the state of the Nation's affairs, and particularly those of the village.

Two other Homesteads are at this time occupied by a builder's premises, the Co-operative Stores and a Shoe Factory. Most of the old houses in this street (now called Church Street) have been demolished and replaced by modern buildings.

The Girls' Charity School was established in 1711 by Sir Gilbert Dolben and others.<sup>1</sup> It was a Resident School for training girls for domestic service. In the eighteen-thirties it was still used for this purpose. Over the front door stood an effigy in painted wood of a Charity School girl. This effigy is still in existence, but is hidden away in an attic. (1930).

The Mistress of the Charity School had a day class for infants, which was attended by both boys and girls.

For many years the Church of England Day School for Girls has been held here. The rooms

1--See page 18.

used for this purpose have been added to and enlarged to meet the growing needs of the village.

Having passed through the main streets of the village it will be interesting to follow one of the "Backways" as they were then called. Many obstructions of that date are now missing. In those days wherever an empty corner could be found the farmer deposited his manure, until it was needed for the land, and here he erected a cart hovel. The saw-pits adjoining the wheelwright's property also extended on to the road side. Much of the land occupied by these obstructions was afterwards claimed as freehold land by the owners of the adjoining property, and some of it has since been built on. There were seven homesteads opening on to this "Backway."

Two old cottages stood on the site where the Temperance Hall was built in 1868. This building is now (1930) known as the Town Hall, and is used for municipal purposes.

One of these cottages was called "Nightingale Cottage."<sup>2</sup> A man lived in it who assisted at the Church Organ.

The cottage behind it was the home of an aged, contented couple. The following distich was affixed to its walls:—

"My house, my house, though thou art small,  
Thou art to me an Escorial."

2--See page 22.

The Orchards were then in their infancy They have now grown old and are sold for building purposes.

Obelisk House, was built by Parson Allington of Twywell for an Inn. But before it was finished Railways were in the wind and it was never used for this purpose.

Crossing to the Wellingborough Road the Obelisk is reached.<sup>3</sup> Its history is clouded in obscurity. A generally accepted opinion is that its erection commemorated a robbery of the Leeds mail at that spot. The empty mail bags were afterwards found in a field up the Thrapston Road. The robbers of the mail were caught and brought to justice. One of them (a notoriously bad character) was hung at Northampton. Some confederates of the thieves were employed in the Bank, and it was through them that the robbers knew the contents of this special mail. They also were brought to justice. Criminals in those days were sent to Botany Bay for life. Botany Bay was at this time a transport station.

The Village Pound was a place in which roving cattle were put until claimed by their owners. It was in frequent use, and was occasionally a great convenience. It looked like a pit, and was well below the level of the road-way.

<sup>3</sup>—See page 22.

The entrance was reached by a sloping path, down which the lost cattle were driven. It was situated at the top of Law's Lane quite close to where the War Memorial stands. (1930) The pit is now filled in and the ground it once occupied is level with the Wellingborough Road. The Custodian of the Pound was an important functionary. Notwithstanding his prestige he was awarded three months' imprisonment in Northampton Gaol for calling the machine-breakers together. (see pg. 13). The Town Crier was also a noted personage.

Agriculture was the chief way in which a living was earned. It was in a depressed state. The wages ranged from 6/- to 8/- per week for an ordinary farm labourer, to 10/- per week for a horse-keeper, whose hours of work were from 4-0 a.m. to 6-0 p.m. Young, strong men when out of work, were paid 1/- a day from the rates. They had to go round to *all* the farmers each morning to ask for work before the desired shilling was given them.

Other industries were shoemaking and tailoring, both for the supply of local wants. A little hand-sewn work was done in the village, the boots being fetched from Wellingborough and taken back there when the work was completed.

Tailors had their boards placed in front of their windows. It was interesting for boys and

others to watch them sitting cross-legged, stitching away. It was the custom for these men to go out to work in private families, where boys required new suits, and whose old suits were needing repairs.

Industries that have died out, and were then in a failing condition are rush mat making, plush-weaving and apple-drying. With the hand-sewn shoe work they were the only trades that brought money *into* the village.

In the late summer the rushes for mat making were pulled out of the streams in the district, and brought from the meadows tied up in small sheaves. They were then stacked in the streets for the sun and air to dry.

At this period there were only two looms at work weaving plush. Apple-drying lingered on in a small way for many years but gradually it also became a lost trade.

From what has already been said about agricultural wages, it will be readily understood, that discontent among the workers was prevalent. This was further increased when machinery was introduced for agricultural purposes.

One day the unemployed dragged the only thrashing machine in the village to the Square,

where it was broken to pieces by hammers which had been taken from the smithy near by.

Much consternation was caused later by the arrival of the military, sent to arrest the culprits. Each exit from the village had its military guard, while other soldiers searched for the rioters. These were ultimately caught and sent for trial. They were found guilty and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, ranging from three to twelve months. The authorities who judged these cases throughout the country seemed terrified by these risings. Instead of trying to find the cause of the discontent, and endeavouring to remedy it, they were determined to subdue it by force. Excessive taxation caused by past wars, and the high price of corn were the main causes of the trouble.

Employments for women were limited to domestic service and lace-making. Some of these lace-makers developed many interesting and strong characteristics. Small as their earnings were, cheerfulness and contentment were evident. As the poet Cowper says:—

“Yon cottager who weaves at her own door  
Pillow and bobbins, all her little store;  
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—  
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew.”

At harvest time nearly every woman and

child in the village turned out to glean, and famous, big loads of grain they would bring home with them. The custom was of such importance that the time for going out to the fields, and that of returning home, was regulated by the ringing of the Church bell.

Bread at this period was largely home-made. That eaten by the working people was of a coarse quality. It was made in half-peck and peck loaves—weighing from 7lbs. to 14lbs. each. It was “cut and come again” with a vengeance. But even at that it was not as often as the appetite required. White bread was made by the baker, and was used as holiday fare. Bacon was the only meat that found a place on the working man’s table. Milk and eggs were cheap.

Clothing was coarse and necessarily durable. A man, the writer knew, had not had a new suit of clothes for 18 years. Many men had no second suit. The only change for Sunday was a clean pair of hose and a clean shirt. The spinning-wheel had not become obsolete. Strong garments were the result of this home spinning.

The Free School built in 1595, standing on the North side of the Churchyard, was used as a day school for boys. From 20 to 30 boys would comprise all the scholars. Few besides the

children of farmers went to school in those days. The education provided was not of a high standard. The master of the Free School had also a class for girls, which was managed by his wife and daughter and supervised by himself. For many years this building has served as the Church of England Day School for Boys.

There were also several lace schools, where children were taught the art of making pillow-lace. From the early age of five years, both boys and girls attended these schools. The old women who kept them, had a long stick by their sides, with which to rap the knuckles of the unfortunate wee scholar who made a mistake or fell asleep over his or her task.

Walking was the only way of getting from place to place. One or two spring conveyances were to be found in the village, in addition to those kept at The Hall and the Vicarage. An old Post chaise could be hired from Wellingborough. Now and again a Pillion and a Sedan Chair might be seen in the streets.

Public conveyances were few. There was the London Wagon, which took a week going to and returning from London. It was arranged with a space at the back in which a few passengers could be accommodated. Six Coaches—three each way—passed the village daily on their way

to and from London—The Leeds Mail, The Manchester Peveril and the Uppingham Coach. These pulled up at the cross roads by the Obelisk, to pick up and set down passengers. To ensure a seat in any of these coaches, it was necessary to book several days beforehand, at a place where the horses were changed. Kettering and Higham Ferrers were the nearest booking places to Finedon. A daily coach from Oxford to Cambridge, and from Cambridge to Oxford, pulled up at Elm Grange on the Wellingborough Road to pick up and set down passengers.

Pigeon Houses were in full use at this period. The birds in such large quantities were objects of great interest. They would not be tolerated by farmers in the present day.

The gardens at The Hall were limited in extent, and The Hall itself was a plainer building than it is now. The Avenue and the Holly Walk were in their prime. Strong winds and winter storms had not yet worked havoc and destruction among the trees.

Postal facilities have improved. In the old days a man used to fetch the letters from Wellingborough and arrived some time during the day. A letter from London would cost 10d., and if specially sent forward from Wellingborough a charge for the messenger would be added to this sum.

Now there is a Post Office from which telegrams can be despatched, postal orders and stamps bought, and money deposited in the Post Office Savings' Bank. There are three letter-boxes in different parts of the village, which are cleared twice a day. The out-bound mails leave three times a day. Letters are delivered twice a day. There are three postmen and an Office Staff. All this is done for a penny a letter and a halfpenny for a post card.

The affairs of the Parish and the Nation are no longer settled at the Smithy. These informal meetings are a thing of the long past. A Council elected by the inhabitants attends to the civic needs of the population.

Finedon, with the rest of the country, has travelled a long way since the eighteen-thirties. The population has increased some seven or eight times. The standard of life is higher. Housing conditions have improved. Trades have multiplied in the village. There is a wider choice of employment for women and girls. Wages have increased. Education has become compulsory and free. Facilities for travel are easier and less expensive. It is possible for the wage-earner to see the beauties of England, and to gain an insight into the lives and ways of living of peoples in

other countries. There are more opportunities for social intercourse at home.

Yet with all these advantages it is questioned whether the moral tone of the community has advanced in proportion to the material progress made? For an answer, it may be interesting to turn to the criminal returns of the country. These show that since education has advanced and become general, crime has diminished.

After contrasting the two periods, surely few, if any, of the residents of Finedon would care to revert to things as they were in the past, and sigh as the old song has it:—

“For the good old plan  
When every rood of ground maintained its man.”

## NOTES

### *Note 1.*

“The Girls’ Charity School was established in or about 1714, by means of a subscription, for the maintenance, clothing and education of poor girls, the principal contributors being Sir Gilbert Dolben, Bart., the lord of the Manor, and his family, his descendants, and the vicar or minister for the time being, have ever since acted in the management or supervision of the institution.

. . . . . In former years, when the

spinning trade was the great employment of the poor in this part of the county, a considerable number of girls, probably 18 or 20, were boarded, maintained and educated at the school by means of the income of the charity, and their profits by spinning. But when the spinning trade ceased, this system was necessarily given up, and for some time there was no settled plan of conducting the charity. For the last 20 years there have been four, five, or six girls at a time, and there are now six girls, taken very young out of the most numerous families in the parish, entirely supported, clothed and educated at the school, until fit to be put out to service. The schoolmistress has a salary of £24 a year and 3/- a week for the maintenance of each of the girls. The girls are allowed for their outfit for service on leaving the school about £3 apiece. The children are employed in lace-making, the profits of which are carried to the general account, but owing to the depressed state of trade the profits are trifling.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“By means of the funds originally raised or other contributions, the following real property has been purchased, and appropriated for the support of the School:—A school-house and outbuildings, a barn-yard and half-an-acre of ground behind the school-house (occupier John Miller) yearly rent £4. Two cottages and a

blacksmith's shop (different tenants) yearly rent £8; a barn used as a Sunday School. A barn, yard, and 57 acres of land (occupier Mr. Robert Smith, yearly tenant), yearly rent £59 11s. 10d.'

(Extracts taken from Charity Commissioners' Reports, 1815-1839).

In the early part of the 19th century the School was supposed to be haunted. Later it was discovered that the noises complained of had been produced by some of the girls living in the School. The following rhyme is of interest and shows what a commotion the said ghost made. My father used to tell us, how people came from the villages round and stood in a crowd under the lime trees opposite the School, waiting for the noises to begin, and in the hopes that the ghost might be seen.

#### THE FINEDON GHOST.

SAY have you heard the Story told,  
Now gaining great renown,  
About the famous haunted house  
That stands in Finedon Town?  
Where noises loud and dismal  
Both day and night abound,  
One moment in the upper rooms,  
The next upon the ground.

The house was built some years ago,  
To benefit the poor;  
Where Charity should educate  
Some twenty girls or more.

But lately through officiousness,  
Or else some other cause,  
Some folks have taken on themselves  
To alter all its laws.

Now if the children go upstairs,  
The noises they begin,  
And frighten all the neighbourhood  
With their terrific din;

The women cry—  
The men grow pale with fear,  
And little children scream aloud  
When they the noises hear.

The windows chatter in their frames,  
The doors fly open all;  
The slates are lifted up and down  
That hang against the wall.  
The noise is talked of all around,  
The news spreads far and near;  
And rumour with her thousand tongues  
Makes horrid sights appear.

The goods are all moved from the house,  
The children sleep away;  
And some of old Saint Crispin's sons  
Now labour there all day.  
And if the spectre should appear,  
Their work they will let fall,  
To dash their lapstones at its skull,  
Or prick it with their awl.

Now let us sing with mirth and glee,  
And still the story tell;  
And may it still bring customers  
To Stanton's at the Bell.  
Nor let the ghost at present fly,  
Nor let the noises budge;  
Lest all around should sneer and laugh,  
And think it but a fudge.

THOMAS DEXTER.

Printed by Whitten, of Wellingborough, sometime in  
the eighteen-twenties.

*Note 2.*

On the North side of the Town Hall can be seen an old stone on which a bird is carved. This carving certainly dates from an older period than the rest of the building. It is conjectured that it once found a place in the walls of Nightingale Cottage, and gave its name to that abode. It must have been built into its present position to preserve it, and to hand on to generations then unborn one of the traditions of the site.

In close proximity to the carved bird is another link with the long past in the name "Tenter Lane." When the weaving and spinning trades flourished, the Lane was in constant use. For it led to the tenter hooks where the woven cloth was taken to be stretched.

*Note 3.*

The origin and purpose of the Obelisk has long remained a mystery which has perplexed the inhabitants of Finedon for many generations. In March, 1925, in going through some old papers in the possession of Miss Ellison, of Mulso Cottage, Finedon the clue to the solution of the "mystery" was found. In an extract taken from the Diary of Sir English Dolben Bart., we read:—"This day I laid the first stone of the Finedon Obelisk, at

the cross Turnpikes, East Town End (Sumpter of Irthlingborough, Mason), as a Direction Pillar and to record the many blessings of 1789."

The question then was asked: what were the special blessings of 1789? The Sunday *Observer* of July 7th, 1929, seems to throw light on this point:—"Of thanksgiving services for restoration to health we may begin with George III. His recovery from his first serious breakdown occurred officially on March 10th, 1789, when there was exhibited at night the most magnificent illumination that perhaps ever lighted up the capital of England and its beautiful environs. . . . The poorest mechanics contributed their proportion, and instances were exhibited of cobblers' stalls decorated with one or two farthing candles."

It is known that Sir English was devoted to the King. The deduction, therefore, that he had the Obelisk built as a thank-offering for His Majesty's recovery does not seem far-fetched. Its erection was made to serve two purposes—a sentimental one and a practical one.



