

ALMSHOUSES

Memoirs of the Almshouse and its Residents

Tape 1 -

Grandparents lived in the almshouses, visited when at school. Would swing on the handle of the water wheel. Sewage at the almshouses still disposed of until 1970s.

Tape 2 -

Grandfather [Green] lived there from 1922 until he died in the 1940's. One up, one down. Had to go to church at 10.0 am – wore a uniform.

Tape 3 -

Grandfather lived there after his wife's death. If a man died first the wife was evicted to the workhouse if no other accommodation offered. Men required to attend church daily at 9.0 am. Mr Cross, a verger a very popular man. A Mr Keene (Baker) and his wife had to be evicted as she was quarrelsome. Went to visit grandparents at age 12 – water pumped up.

Tape 5 -

Almshouse residents, remembers Mr and Mrs Chalklin and Mrs Poupart.

Tape 6 -

Old blacksmith called Davies there in the 1920's.

Tape 12 -

The Almshouses were run by a retired nursing sister recommended by the Master. She had a surgery, went round in a white coat. Sister Heaney when they first came. Then came Sister Bennett who had written a book. More of a nurse than they are now.

Tape 14 -

In the 1960's there was a major refurbishment and the number decreased from 13 – 8, hence the need for Suffolk House to make up for the depleted number.

Tape 15 -

A woman called Mary Harris [? Or Brown see Tape 17 below] who painted flower pictures.

Tape 16 -

Her uncle was up there and she used to take him meals. Isn't like it used to be.

Tape 17 -

Almshouses - Dore Winfield (Theodore). Just at the time I came (1970) there was a little encyclopaedia (one a week things) came out and there was an article about the euphonium and a picture of Dore playing his euphonium. I got to know him and he was a part of Mr Greenway who died soon after I came here. Dore was the man of history, always telling me stories about things. But there was always someone to say he didn't know what he was talking about.

Mrs Minnie Harris came to live in the almshouses and she was the first lady to be admitted as an 'almsperson' in her own right. Minnie Harris had also been a schoolmistress here. She taught in the school and I gather that she and the headmaster didn't agree about a number of things and so in the end she was asked to leave. She was a lady who knew her way around the village.

The almshouses were being modernised when we came. There were only 5 living there and one was Dore Winfield. They moved people around as they were doing the building. Had a change of personnel, two were allocated to the diocese for clergy. One of the early clergy was the brother of Chad Varrah, the Samaritan man who lived where Mrs Jones is now and had a grand piano up those stairs. Also Architects Association

were offered one because they had a lot to do with the oversight of the alterations, and the person who came in there was Mr and Mrs Brown. Mrs Brown is more noted than her husband because she is the lady who painted the wonderful flower pictures. It did mark a change of personnel coming into the almshouses. Joan Cannon was warden of almshouses for nearly 11 years since 1986.

Tape 19 -

Mr Rowland took auctions and always started proceedings by saying "Will you give me something for these 'ere..." Mr Keene in The Old Bakery who's first wife died, married again and he was a wonderful baker. He lived in the almshouses with his second wife. She caused so much trouble that she was put out. He however, stayed on. After that they could be found having a cuddle in the evening near the telegraph pole opposite Elizabeth Parkin's house.

Controversy over type of person allowed in new almshouses. People in village applied but because they were considered the 'wrong class' they were not given housing. Original purpose for which almshouses were built was felt to be cast aside. Rumour was that village people applying were ignored and others applying who owned property were 'allowed' to sell it and gained access. Feeling ran high.

Tape 22 -

Service for cloister men at 10.0 am obligatory if well - every weekday. Again no women allowed to stay after spouse's death, a hard rule but as women usually live longer one can understand it.

Tape 24 -

None of his parents/grandparents lived in the almshouses. Used to play tricks on the Verger who lived in them. Go to the church late at night - Brian Orpwood and Ron Gilbey lowered him down the to the clock by his ankles, the time would be changed so the clock struck the wrong time. The verger would puff up the stairs whilst they hid behind the bells and change the clock back. Waited for him to return to his home and repeat the exercise. The verger gradually got wise to the trick and chased them. They had to run along the top of the roof leapt through the battlements and dropped onto a chest tomb 12ft below!

Tape 27 -

She remembers Mrs Poupart. Both felt the almshouses should be for the village people and not for the wealthy or incomers.

Tape 31 -

You made an interesting comment you said a man from the Air Force lived in the Muniment Room, how did that come about?

The minute the war started all families had to leave the aerodrome - Mr Brooks must have known someone and he went in because he had 4 children. He was the organist and a nice pianist.

Was the Muniment Room any different than when Mr Brooks lived in it or how we see it today?

When the War started they brought lots of people out from London and they were put up, a woman and two children came to me - well, of course people couldn't put up with it - but most cottages were very small so they put a few people into the Muniment Room at the beginning of the War. Where Mrs O'Riley lives, some were in there - some in what was the Masters Room. that has been altered.

That was the Masters Room.

Mr Brooks went in after they had gone back to London. Somehow he must have known someone unless she [his wife] was from London.

There is no water in the place at present - what did they do?

I don't know. Unless they had access to downstairs they used the pump I expect. Nobody had water then. So they just used all the amenities everyone else used.

Coming back to the Almshouses - there were 13 dwellings, one down and one up, but there is a reference in the statutes to a Common Room that the men used.

Was that the sisters cottage? Was it the one inside, just inside the doors? There is a telephone there now.

That leads into the School House?

Yes. They kept medicines there - it was a dispensary.

Was it ever a bath house there? Where did people bath?

I never knew a bath house there, the only place I knew was a wash house, they had a wash house there and I cannot remember it they used it as a mortuary as well. The bath house was where the washers are.

So the wash house was where the gardens are at present and the other things that went out into the School Masters Garden were the toilets?

Yes, you know you go to put washing on the line that was the passage with the toilets - there were two, one for men and one for women.

Its a very large building for just two toilets.

It is a large building and it seemed huge to us when we were children. I never went in them myself. I used to go to my grandfathers and grandmothers who lived at No. 7..

Tape 32 -

George Cannon – The Masters House. I have seen it was a separate building and not incorporated into the almshouses as it is now. Was it a detached house?

No, it was always tacked onto the corner of the almshouses seated under churchyard wall under south porch of church. Garden was a big affair and walled and used by my father as a school garden, grew quite a lot of good vegetables. Other garden in the triangular patch between annexe and Nurses Cottage and other gardens came into use by the allotments near the common. Schoolboys tilled 3 patches of land.

Tape 41-

George Cannon said – “Your mother Minnie Harris was the first lady to come in her own right. I was still schoolmaster in those days and used to pay them their monthly stipend and I well remember giving her the first payment and I think that was a historical moment £3. 2. 6d a month. I took it to the houses. Not on the tomb any more.” My grandfather was in No 9 went about 1916 a Winfield. During the war the Masters Flat was occupied by service people from the RAF.

I remember [Sgt] Brooks in the Master’s Flat. Son is down the village here now.

File 45 -

My grandparents were George and Florence Hartnup. They lived at No 8 in the Almshouses, which consisted of one room downstairs with a table and chairs in the middle of the room, with a red chenille tablecloth and well polished brass oil lamp. (There being no water, gas or electricity laid on then). A black leaded grate which was always burning, summer and winter, this being the only means of cooking and there was always a large kettle singing on the hob. At meal times the chenille cloth and lamp were removed and washing up was done on the scrubbed wooden surface. The dirty water was then tipped into a pail and put behind a curtain in a niche just inside the front door, to be disposed of later. There was a large bay window in this room which was always full of red geraniums. A wooden door with a latch led upstairs to the bedroom.

All the water had to be drawn from the well in the centre of the square and my sister and I loved to go and wind up the large wheel to collect the water.

The toilets, for the ladies, were along the corridor where I think there were four toilets. Wooden boxes with a hole in the top over a bucket. By the side of the toilets was a long wooden box and the residents put the

ashes from their fires to cover the excrement. The men's toilets were further along the corridor and outside on the path leading to the wood yard.

Each almshouse had its own garden and Granpie's was a patch through the gate towards the nurse's house. The residents also had a woodhouse overlooking the wood yard and I used to go with Granpie to help sharpen the knives on the wheel. We also used to play in the wood yard and Peggy Quixley would often join us. [Younger daughter of Mr Robert Quixley, the Headmaster]

When Granpie died [on 19th October 1941 aged 86] Grannie had to leave No 8 and she went to live in a tiny cottage overlooking the Common, but her cottage looked towards the village. [Now Number One Old Rectory Cottages]. This cottage was very similar to the Almshouse, one room up and one room down. Still no water, gas or electricity. There was a wooden shed at the bottom of the garden, just inside the gate, which was a toilet, copper and coalhouse. Beside the front door was a well. I believe this cottage has now been taken into the one it backed on to. Grannie died in 1959 aged 90.

Some years later I went with my Aunt to visit Minnie Harris who was then living at No 8. It hadn't altered at all.

File 55 -

I have a copy of Miss Prister Cruttwell's "Ewelme its history and its people" but then I was in the 1951 pageant. She refers to an interview with Ferdinand Winfield in chapter 8 of her history. The almsman was not Ferdinand White and I have had a problem with her account - although she does admit he was called Ferdy by the others.

The name Ferdinand White refers to a son of Mary Anne(Phillips)Winfield(1840 ? - 1921) who thought she was married to John Winfield (1843 - 1923) and later married Sam Walklin and was described in the same chapter as ending her days in the workhouse. In any case Ferdinand White died in Croydon.

Miss Cruttwell was growing up in Ewelme from 1901 to about 1911. Frederick Winfield was an almsman who died in 1906 aged 80. He had at one time been a sawyer and a "gentlemans servant" and had married Harriet T?(1819 - 1887) from Woodstock in Wallingford in 1856. They appear to have had no children - not surprisingly! Frederick would be a great uncle of Ferdinand White. Was she confused with Frederick?

Frederick would be my great great great uncle. (Uncle of Ellen Winfield who married Moses!)

File 56 -

These were treated with great respect, no running, or playing here, peaceful quiet.

Miscellaneous comment - Mary 'Granny' Hutchings' her claim to fame, being the first woman to be allowed to remain in the Almshouses, and not automatically evicted when her husband died. Mary married three times, firstly to a Beecham, and their son Steve was well known in the village as a handyman who also lived in Church Cottage on the Common. She then married a Spiers, and their son George was Cecil's father. After being widowed again, she then became Mrs Hutchings, living in one of the bungalows along Cottesmore Lane, demolished during the war when the runway was extended. Mary lived to be 94 years of age dying in 1965, and when 'royalty visited the church' she would be presented as the oldest Cloister resident.