

Finedon Local History Society



Finedon Railway Station, c1900

*See: Arthur Roper, Stationmaster,
Finedon Railway Station (1896 – 1910)*

Newsletter

May 2019

Chairman's Notes

In the last edition of the Society Newsletter (January 2019) Carolyn Smith wrote an article entitled, "*Finedon Quakers and their Meeting House*". This has proved to be a very apt valedictory piece as the Society has now been given formal notice to vacate the Meeting House by the end of June.

The Society will continue as the committee and others develop the way in which we can move forward from the loss of the Meeting House. The monthly meetings at the Mission Room with a guest speaker will continue. The members newsletter, published three times a year, written by Mick Britton and Carolyn Smith, will not be affected either. Research on the history and people of Finedon will also continue to be undertaken; one potential future project being considered is for Ron Clayton and Mick Britton to work together and adapt their respective Volta Tower and Lt. William Digby Mackworth Dolben, FRGS, RN research, which formed the basis of their 2016 exhibition material, into the next Society publication.

One thing that will have to change, as we no longer have a permanent venue, will be our exhibitions. It is hoped that these will continue, albeit in different format and venue over a shorter time.

To assist a new up and coming history society some of our larger display cases and boards have been lent to Ringstead Heritage Group (www.ringsteadheritage.com) on a long-term loan arrangement with the proviso it will be returned if and when we can secure an alternative venue.

At this time (mid-April) the Meeting House is being cleared whilst we await confirmation (or otherwise) of a secure location in Finedon in which we can store our equipment and records.

We will continue to keep our members up-to-date with all developments.

David Bailey

Following In The Footsteps Of The Late Phil Gobbey

Janet Schmelzer

Having read Phil Gobbey's, "Memories of Finedon", Janet (nee Dunkley of Mulso Road) has kindly written her own memories of Finedon having left for the US some 64 years ago!



Janet Schmelzer

I enjoyed reading the late Phil Gobbey's description of his stroll around Finedon where he mentioned many of the shops and businesses operating in his day. Phil was born in 1922 and I in 1933 and I'd like to take a similar stroll around Finedon pointing out the changes that had taken place between Phil's stroll, and my youth up to the time I left Finedon in 1955.

In the years that Phil wrote about Finedon appeared to be fairly self-sufficient for a small town and to a certain extent it was still that way in my youth. There were still a variety of shops, though some of the coal merchants, builders, milk suppliers, fruit and vegetable dealers were no longer in business.

Phil's stroll began by describing Berry Green, and although I remember the row of houses, I don't recall the business premises of Harry Durden nor Brock Nichols. I do remember Brock and his taxi service but can't recall whether he was able to continue this when petrol rationing started. The Town Hall housed the library, which I believe was a branch of the Wellingborough Public Library, and it was open on a couple of evenings a week as I recall. Harry Durden lived in a cottage near the church and I think he may have been the church sexton.

I remember the Band Club and the Gas Works and used to love the smell of the latter for some reason. My dad had a greenhouse which was heated by a coke fire and he had to fetch the coke from the Gas Works. He had a wooden cart with sides that he called the truck, and he needed help getting the loaded "truck" up Co-op Hill to get home. When I was old enough, I was commandeered to

push the truck while dad pulled it up that steep hill then he was ok getting it across Wellingborough Rd and halfway up Mulso Road, where we lived. This was often after his usual work day; my dad was a very hard worker.

Continuing along Orchard Road to Albert Road where my paternal grandmother and dad's two unmarried sisters lived. I spent quite a bit of time there but have no memory of the Mrs Fox who was a dealer for Cow & Gate babies milk powder. I'm wondering if this lady had moved to Mulso Rd because just up the street from us there was a small grocery/sweet shop owned by a Mrs Fox.

Across Orchard Road was the Infant School which I gather was built in the early 1930s and I may well have been one of the earliest pupils as I started school after Easter when I was a bit over 4 years old; this would not happen now I'm sure. The only occupants of the few houses on that side of Orchard Road I remember were the Coles family, as I went to school with their only daughter, Sheila.



Infant School and Lace Curtain Row. c1940

As Phil wrote, at the end of "Lace Curtain Row" and on the corner of Victoria Road the Moisey's had a small shop in their front room but Mr Moisey must have died by my time as it was run by the two Miss Moisey's (his daughters I presume)? Even during World War Two they still occasionally made ice cream and I have a vague

recollection of one of the ladies pushing a handcart selling ice cream – but I could be wrong.

Unlike Phil I'm going to continue my stroll past the few houses that stretched almost to Burton Road because the Banks Park had recently been constructed. The groundskeeper was a Mr Rolls who lived further up Burton Road. He was very strict and we could tell he didn't really approve of children in "his" park; as there were many "Keep off the Grass" signs and I remember him adding a verbal warning to me and another girl about the grass when we were just exploring the new park and staying on the paths.

Near the top of High St. and across from the Infant School I remember the small sweet shop in the home of the Billington's though if it made it through the war years of rationing, I don't recall, but have my doubts. The Jacques shop Phil mentions was not there in my time, nor was The Royal Oak. The first business in that section of High St I can recall was the bicycle shop owned by Jim Bowles who sold and repaired bicycles. Perhaps he continued the business there from Reg York mentioned by Phil.

Phil also mentions the Goodman's who sold newspapers, sweets, etc. but I think that little shop had a different owner in my day and on my final visit to Finedon it was a florist shop owned by Betty Colby (her maiden name) who I remembered as the daughter of my grandma's neighbour in Albert Road during my childhood. In fact I'm wondering if the Goodman's were the same family who moved and owned a similar shop at the top of Obelisk Road in my youth. What the other few shops sold in that row I can't recall but do just remember Williams butcher shop on the opposite corner on Waterlow Bridge.

Well, I'm a little weary after my walk but will add to it in instalments.

** Copies of Phil's booklet, "Memories of Finedon" are available from the society at £3.50.*

Finedon 18th Century Industries - Finedon Dried Apples

Carolyn Smith

Following on from Carolyn's first article on Finedon 18th Century Industries covering Mat Making (September 2018 newsletter) Carolyn now moves onto the well-known Finedon Dried Apple Industry, which for the best part of 150 years put Finedon on the centre of the map for these famous delicacies.

Dried apples were produced in Finedon as a by-product of the baking industry. After the daily bake had been removed from the oven trays of apples, preferably Norfolk Biffins, Meltons or Pippins, would replace them. This was to make use of the heat as the brick ovens cooled. The apples used had tough skins and after each period of cooking the apples were cooled and then gently pressed between thumb and forefinger. This process was repeated a number of times until the apples were about half an inch thick and fully dried. The apples would then be packed into boxes ready for sale and transportation. Once dried the apples would keep for months and could be rehydrated and then used as a dessert when fresh supplies of fruit had exhausted.

It is impossible to say why Finedon dried apples became so popular. It could have been as simple as a local entrepreneur seeing an opportunity and exploiting it and being ahead of the competition. Advertisements indicate that the height of their popularity was between about 1770 through to the 1830s. Some producers sold direct to their customers while others used agents in Northampton and other towns. All retailers were willing to provide small and large quantities and were willing to send their apples to all corners of the kingdom.

Transportation used would have been horse and cart for local deliveries. For longer distances several different stagecoaches passed close to Finedon, so apples could be in London and other large towns very quickly. The agents in Northampton also had the facilities on the Nene navigation available to transport the apples down to the coast, and the Grand Junction Canal could transport them to the north and south of the country.

An advertisement for Finedon Dried Apples in the Northampton Mercury of 25th March 1773 reads:

Finedon, March 22, 1773

Thomas Smith begs Leave to acquaint the public, that he sells, Wholesale and Retail, right good Bottled CYDER, both Quarts and Pints; and fix Months Credit given, if required. Likewise the Nobility, Gentry and Others may be supplied with excellent fine Dried APPLES (such can be scarcely can be had elsewhere) And, at the Seasons of the Year, with finest APPLES and PEARS of all Kinds, and other Fruit. Those Gentlemen and Ladies, who please to favour him with their Custom, may depend upon hlm the best Usage, and their Orders, faithfully and punctually obeyed by Their most obedient, humble Servant.

THOMAS SMITH

N.B. The said Thomas Smith has dealt in the above Articles for nearly forty Years past.

The reasons for a decline in demand for Finedon dried apples seem to have been complex. Production seems to have held up through the period, and presumably there was no decline in quality, so other factors seem to have been at play. The market for the product was amongst the more affluent sections of society. The mid 1810s, when decline in demand seems to have begun, saw the end of the Napoleonic Wars. Very quickly the first advertisements appear for French, Normandy and even Turkey dried apples. This competition would have been arriving by ship into the docks in London and may have had cheaper transport costs than those for Finedon dried apples. By the 1840s significant quantities of American dried apples were arriving in Bristol and Liverpool. Two cities that would have had a significant pool of customers for these apples, and both were places that would have needed a long overland journey from Finedon. Perhaps also the kudos, for the hostess, of having French or American dried apples to give to their guests helped precipitate the decline in demand for

From Our Archives



*Junction of High Street and Affleck Bridge (a.k.a. Mulso Square)
The Old Smithy, demolished in 1926, with the dummy clock on
the gable wall. Around the top of the clock are the words,
"NEXT BUS TO FINEDON STATION STARTS AT"
From the collection of the late Freda Drage.*



*Widow's Row, looking towards the Parish Church c1942.
The Row was demolished in 1962.*



Laying of the Wreath, Finedon Scout War Memorial, 1967
(this writer was present but is out of camera shot!)
Donated by Marjorie and the late Ken Toop.



Cubs and Brownie Parade, Allen Road. c1930
Donated by Nigel Perrett

the Finedon variety. Foreign imports of dried apples were also aided in 1836, over home-grown products, by what was reported in The North Devon Journal and other newspapers as *“frivolous reductions in taxation at the withdrawal of duties on prunes and dried apples, whilst heavier taxes; bearing most grievously on the poor, have remained untouched.”*

At the time when Finedon dried apples were being produced there were three bake houses in Finedon. The one known as Stanton's bake house stood at the junction of what is now Bell Hill and Regent Street. Benjamin Sharp was the baker and there is no evidence that he produced any dried apples.

On Affleck Bridge (formerly Bake House Brig) stood an ancient bake house that was owned in 1739 by Thomas Mulso. By 1806 ownership had passed to the Revd. John Mulso and Thomas Butlin was the baker. As this bake house remained in the occupation of the Butlin family, we can be certain that this was one of the sites of production of dried apples.

Thomas Butlin's parents, Thomas and Ann, had moved to Finedon from Hollowell probably in 1730. Thomas senior is variously described as a weaver but also as a baker. He died in 1741 leaving his widow with three small children. In about 1750 she apprenticed her son Thomas to William Harris, a baker, of Wellingborough. Thomas probably returned to Finedon immediately after the end of his apprenticeship in about 1757/8. It is not known where Thomas Smith baked and produced his dried apples, but it could well have been in the Mulso owned bake house and Thomas Butlin could have begun working for him on his return to Finedon.

If William Butlin's advertisement of 1829 is to be believed, then the Butlin family had been producing dried apples commercially since 1799. The family bakers at that time would have been the aforementioned Thomas and his son Thomas, who was William's father. Thomas senior died in 1805, and was succeeded by his son Thomas, and possibly 12-year-old William. Thomas junior died in 1815 and William took over the bake house lease. It was William who produced and supplied Finedon dried apples during the first half of the 19th century and could well have continued production until his death in 1873.

The other centre of production in Finedon was the bake house on the south side of what is now High Street, known as Spring Gardens. The bake house was owned in 1739 by James Affleck. Unfortunately, the baker's name is not known but it could have been William Bullivant, who was master to apprentice William Barker in the 1720s. This bake house eventually passed into the ownership of John Barker, who may have been William's son. It was recorded as owned by John's widow, Dorothy, in 1806, when their sons, Thomas and John, were the bakers. Thomas inherited the bake house and it was he who demolished the original bake house replacing it with the one that was demolished in the 1960s.

The first evidence of the Barker family producing dried apples is an advertisement of 10th October 1829 declaring that Frances Barker was still able to supply fine flavoured apples, Frances was John's widow. Although there were no further newspaper advertisements from the Barker family production must have continued because, after her marriage to Benjamin Chapman, Frances advised her customers that Mr and Mrs B. Chapman (late Barker) had on sale dried apples of the best quality. It was this family, and bake house, that were said to be the last to produce these delicacies. Edmund Berry Chapman, Benjamin's son from his first marriage continued as baker on this site into the 1880s and a local tradition states that he was still producing dried apples in that decade.



*Affleck Bridge from Dolben Square c1904.
The bakehouse was behind the building on the right of the
photograph.*

Arthur Roper, Stationmaster, Finedon Railway Station (1896 – 1910)

Mick Britton

For the Society annual general meeting in November last year I put together a presentation of photographs from our own archives. One of these photographs was of Finedon Railway Station, c.1900 (see newsletter front cover). This was of special interest to Society member Gill Thornton as her grandfather, Arthur Roper, is standing on the platform, resplendent in his stationmaster's uniform, with his staff in what is no doubt an official photograph. Gill had never seen this photograph before!



Arthur Roper
The Carr Collection

Arthur, son of Thomas, a carpenter, and Harriet of Great Malvern, Worcestershire was born in 1870. He entered the service of the Midland Railway on 13th June 1884, aged 14, as a goods clerk at Irchester Station on a wage of 6 shillings (30p) a week. Arthur was to remain at Irchester for the next 11 years as he was promoted through the grades becoming the Chief Goods Clerk on a salary of £70 per annum.

In June 1893 Arthur was transferred to the new Rushden Station, as the Chief Goods Clerk, upon the opening of the branch line from Wellingborough to Rushden and Higham Ferrers.

Three months later, on 2nd October 1893, Arthur was promoted to Stationmaster of Higham Ferrers Station in preparation for the opening of the new station to passengers in May 1894 (the branch line officially opened to goods traffic on 1st September 1893).

The Northampton Mercury newspaper of the 4th May 1894 reports, "*The Wellingborough, Rushden and Higham Ferrers Railway. A new era in the history of the thriving districts of Rushden and Higham Ferrers opens to-day in connections with the commencement of passenger traffic upon the new railway which the Midland (Railway Company) have constructed*". The report continues, "*During the last few days great activity has prevailed at all the stations in preparation for the opening, and Mr. Turner, Mr.*

Pitt (former Stationmaster of Finedon prior to his transfer to Rushden) and Mr. Roper (Higham Ferrers) were able to report all ready for the traffic to begin, whilst every arrangement had been made to cope with the extraordinary rush of passengers expected...The first train was timed to start from Higham at 7.40am, the townsfolk were early astir in their preparations to celebrate the important event...their curiosity being satisfied about 7.20am, when the train destined to perform the first journey arrived from Wellingborough with officials. The train consisted of two engines, Nos 2022 and 212 and nineteen coaches, including two first-class saloons."

The opening of the line to passengers was not the only celebration for Arthur at this time as in 1894 he married Charlotte Annie Saxby of Irchester. (Her brothers, Edward and Herbert, were to open what became Saxby Bros Ltd in 1904).

Arthur was to remain as the Stationmaster of Higham Ferrers until July 1896 when he was transferred to Finedon Station as Stationmaster. Finedon Station, which was opened in 1857 by the Midland Railway, was a quiet station in terms of passenger numbers; not helped by being so far from Finedon and the limited number of passenger trains that stopped at the station. The goods traffic would have generated more in terms of income than passenger revenue.

The 1901 census, taken on the 31st March, records Arthur living in the Finedon Stationmaster's House with his wife Charlotte and their two children Doris May, aged 5, and Roland Saxby, aged 4. They were true "railway children" with Doris born in the Higham Stationmaster's House whilst Roland was born at Finedon Station!

Arthur remained at Finedon for 14 years until he moved to his final posting as the Stationmaster at Wellingborough (Midland Road). Arthur was to serve the Midland Railway (which became the LMS in 1923) for another 20 years in this post until his retirement on 31st October 1931. A total of 47 years' service; 38 years of which were as a Stationmaster.

The Wellingborough News reported his retirement, it reported, (Arthur) said, "...that on occasions like this it was very difficult to collect one's thought". It was 21 years ago when he left the

Finedon Station that he received his last presentation. It was very delightful thing for him to feel that many of the staff who were at the station when he came were still there and that he had so conducted the business of the Company so as to earn their respect". The report further states, "He said it had been a pleasure to work with the men, and then thanked them for their loyalty and hearty co-operation".



*Arthur, Roland (Gill's father), Doris and Charlotte Roper, c1912.
Family Photograph*

Arthur's retirement, living in Ranelagh Road, Wellingborough was not to last long as he died, aged 65, on 25th November 1935. The demise of Finedon Station was to begin five years later as it closed to passenger traffic on 2nd December 1940 continuing with goods traffic only until it finally closed in 1964.

This article has been written from several sources including family history and photographs from Gill Thornton and an overview of the Arthur's career researched by Peter Butlin from records held by The Midland Railway Society. Peter is the author of 'Midland Railway. The Rushden - Higham Ferrers Branch' (2009). Finally, the portrait photograph of Arthur was provided by Irchester historian Jon-Paul Carr.

From Our Archives

With the recent demolition of the former Finedon St. John Ambulance HQ building in Milner Road and the current building construction on the same site, a look back at its official opening.

Bill Paterson is on the right of the top picture.

If anyone has names that can be added to our archive details, then please get in touch.

Both photographs are from the collection of Ted Amey.



Finedon Local History Society, 2019 Programme

20th May

A Visit to Desborough Heritage Centre. See below

24th June

James Sheehan

Aspects of Church Architecture

(Please note that on the 2019 Society membership card this event is shown as the 25th June; that date is incorrect)

22nd July

Stephen Radley

Finedon Hall, Humphry Repton and late 18th century landscapes

19th August

Chris Rowe

Tales from the Tudor Table

23rd September

Ron Whittaker

The Rise and Fall of Footwear Manufacture in the UK

28th October

Neil Busby, Thrapston District Historical Society

What was learnt from the recent archaeological digs in Thrapston

25th November

Annual General Meeting

All talks commence at 7.30pm at the Mission Hall, Well Street.

Members £2.50 and non-members £3.50

Please note that speakers and the subject topics may change at short notice due to circumstances beyond our control

Visit to Desborough Heritage Centre.

A visit has been arranged to this award-winning Heritage Centre on Monday 20th May at 7.30pm. The Centre have several exhibition rooms and displays including a new exhibition dedicated to their boot and shoe industry. The cost of the visit will be £5 which covers a guided tour followed by refreshments. The maximum number that can be accommodated is 25 so names are being taken on a first come – first served basis. For further details or to book a place please contact Mick on 07988 065010 or michael.britton@ntlworld.com