



## THE QUICKENDEN AGED POOR DINNER

Edmund, son of Robert and Elizabeth Quickenden, was baptised on 26th November 1826 at the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul in Lingfield. By 1841 Edmund, aged 14 years, was living in Edenbridge where he was apprenticed to Stephen Waters, a draper. In 1850 Edmund married Elizabeth Mary Weston, the sister of his employer Alfred Weston who was a draper and grocer. The 1851 census shows Edmund and Elizabeth living in Alfred's household in the village of Chalfont St Giles, Buckinghamshire. (Interestingly, Elizabeth is recorded under her maiden name and both are shown as unmarried - was this an error on the part of Alfred and/or the enumerator, or did they marry in secret for some reason?) In 1854 the couple had a daughter, Mary, who was born at Chalfont St Giles.

By 1861 Edmund, Elizabeth and Mary had moved to Harefield, Middlesex. Edmund established his own business as a draper and grocer - he later became the village postmaster as well - and settled in Harefield, where he lived for many years.

Edmund married four times - his first wife Elizabeth died in January 1869 and he remarried the following year to Harriet Elizabeth Ratcliff, 13 years his junior. Harriet died in February 1887 and, just under four months later, in June 1887 Edmund married Ann Mellish - a 60 year old spinster. Ann died in May 1891.

At that time Edmund was planning to retire from business and move to Dormansland, which he subsequently did. In July 1892 he married for a fourth time, his new wife being 47 year old Sarah Withers who had worked for him in Harefield.

In 1897 Edmund was involved in the local celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, when he was a member of the 'Dinner Committee' responsible for organising *"the dinner to all the labouring classes, together with their wives and all persons over 16 years of age... attended by approximately 1,200 persons, who sat down in two relays"*.

This may have been the inspiration for the first 'Dinner to the Aged Poor of Dormans Land' held in May 1900, arranged by the Dormans Land Lodge of the RAOB (Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes aka 'the Buffs' - a philanthropic organisation founded in the 1800s). On 12th May 1900 the East Grinstead Observer reported that *"Over 50 of the hard-working old residents of the village assembled at the Plough, where they were cordially greeted and soon made quite at home. The dinner, provided under Miss Glover's kindly direction, was of a most substantial and appetising character and it was thoroughly enjoyed....."*. Edmund was one of the *"small army*

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*of volunteers" involved. The meal was followed by an "entertaining concert" and prizes, which were "nearly all of the value of half a crown" (12½p), were awarded for various circumstances (some of which would not be considered politically correct nowadays): oldest widow, oldest widower, youngest widow, youngest widower, pleasantest looking man, pleasantest looking woman, best male singer, best lady singer, oldest lady, oldest male resident, oldest lady resident, most sons in the Army or Navy, largest family, longest in one house, (woman with) a sick husband the longest! Those present "not included in the above fortunate or unfortunate list were consoled with a gift of a shilling, while every man had a packet of tobacco and every woman a packet of tea."*

In May 1901 the local newspaper reported on "The Buffs' Dinner to the Aged Poor", when Edmund was once again on the organising committee.



*Early 1900s postcard of The Plough Inn  
(published by John Jupp of Lingfield)*

The dinner became an annual event, taking place on a Wednesday in early May at The Plough Inn where the landlady, Miss Alice Glover, was in charge of the catering. Around 40 to 50 of the older residents of Dormans Land were treated to a substantial meal, followed by musical entertainment and the handing out of prizes. Every year both ladies and men went away happy with their respective packets of tea or tobacco!

In 1908 Edmund appears to have assumed responsibility for organising the dinner, as the East Grinstead Observer carried a report on the "*Annual Dinner to the Aged Poor ... arranged by Mr E Quickenden, assisted by Mr A E Potter and Mr A Andrews*" and refers to Mr Potter proposing a vote of thanks to Edmund for "*arranging the dinner which was in danger of falling through*".

Towards the close of the 1909 dinner Mr Potter proposed "*a hearty vote of thanks to Mr Quickenden for the trouble he had taken in arranging the dinner and collecting*

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*the subscriptions". In reply Edmund stated that the dinner to the aged poor was one of his red letter days and "he was extremely glad to see so many happy faces around him". An annual concert was held in order to raise funds towards the dinner and Edmund, a keen singer, often performed at these events.*

Edmund died very shortly afterwards on 31st May 1909, aged 82 years.

The East Grinstead Observer of 12th June 1909 reported: "*The village has sustained a loss which will be very widely and keenly felt through the death of Mr Edmund Quickenden, who breathed his last on Whit-Monday morning, after a short illness.*" The report went on to say that "*The deceased gentleman, who formerly resided at Harefield, where he was the owner of some property, came to reside in Dormans Land about 20 years ago, and during the whole time of his residence here he always took a great interest in all that concerned the welfare of the place. His philanthropic work was of an extensive character, and he has often been heard to say that one of the greatest pleasures of his life was to preside at the annual old people's dinner, which he was instrumental in arranging for a long succession of years..... He was exceedingly fond of music and could sing a good song, and only a week or two before his death sang his last in public at the old folks' dinner...*"

Following his death Edmund's friends carried on the running of the dinner and fund-raising activities. In January 1912 the East Grinstead Observer reported that a "*most successful*" smoking concert in aid of the Quickenden Aged Poor Dinner Fund had taken place at The Plough Inn. (A smoking concert consisted of music, songs and sometimes recitations before an audience of men only, who would smoke and perhaps discuss political matters during the performance.) Mr R R Fowler, the chairman for the evening, proposed a toast to 'The Quickenden Aged Poor Dinner Fund' which "*he believed was started some 15 years ago by their late lamented friend... who worked with zeal for the fund which provided such an enjoyable time for the old people*". Mr Fowler was president of the fund, assisted by Mr Potter as honorary secretary and Miss Glover as honorary treasurer.

The last dinner before the outbreak of the First World War was held on Wednesday 5th May 1914 when "*About 60 of the old folk living at Dormansland spent a very happy afternoon at the Plough Inn. The occasion was the annual dinner founded by the late Mr Quickenden and kept up partly as a memorial to him... The proceedings commenced with an excellent dinner, provided by the Hostess (Miss Glover). The meal, which was fully done justice to, was followed by a very entertaining programme, which the old folks thoroughly enjoyed. The usual competitions evoked much interest...*"

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### Sources:

*East Grinstead Observer (West Sussex Record Office)*

*Findmypast (www.findmypast.co.uk): Birth, Marriage, Death & Parish Records;*

*British Newspaper Collection; Census Records*

*Hayward Collection, Hayward History Centre at Lingfield Library*

*Wikipedia*