



## THE QUICKENDEN AGED POOR DINNER

Edmund Quickenden was baptised on 26th November 1826 at the Parish Church of St Peter & St Paul in Lingfield, where his parents Robert and Elizabeth lived. By 1841, at the age of 14, Edmund 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, when their occupations were described as shopman and shopwoman respectively. In 1854 their daughter Mary was born at Chalfont St Giles. The 1861 census shows Edmund, Elizabeth and Mary living at Harefield, Middlesex, where Edmund had his own business as a draper and grocer. Elizabeth died at Harefield in January 1869 and Edmund remarried the following year. His new wife was Harriet Eliza Ratcliff who had been born in Ruislip, Middlesex, and was some 13 years his junior. At the time of the 1871 census Edmund, Harriet and Mary were shown living at a grocer's shop in Harefield, with Edmund's occupation again being that of a draper and grocer. The 1881 census records them living in the High Street, Harefield (quite possibly at the grocer's shop) and Edmund's occupation is shown as grocer. The census also includes Alfred Bentley, a 25 year old clerk, who was visiting the family. Mary and Alfred married in 1882, although this was short-lived as Alfred died the following year.

Harriet died in February 1887 and when administration of her estate was granted to Edmund in March his occupation was given as postmaster. In June 1887 (just four months later) Edmund married Ann Mellish, a spinster of similar age to himself who had been born in Edenbridge, when he gave his occupation as grocer. The 1891 census finds Edmund and Mary at the Railway Hotel in Chiddingstone, visiting Thomas Jesse Smallpiece (the innkeeper) and his wife Alice, when Edmund is once again recorded as a postmaster. (Thomas Jesse Smallpiece had been a witness to Edmund and Ann's wedding in 1887.) Ann appears to have remained at home "minding the shop" in High Street, Harefield. Other members of the household included a draper's assistant and a grocer's assistant, so possibly Edmund was the village postmaster as well as running a business as both draper and grocer. Perhaps the responsibility proved too much for Ann as she died in at the beginning of June 1891!

During the following year it appears that Edmund retired from business and returned to live in the area where he was born. In July 1892 he married for the fourth time, giving his place of residence as Dormans Land and his occupation as gentleman. His new wife was Sarah Withers, a 47 year old spinster, who had been born in Edenbridge.

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The 1898 electoral roll for Harefield, where he still owned property, records Edmund living at Quaker's Plat, Dormans Land, which is also the address given for him and Sarah in the 1901 census.

Edmund died on 31st May 1909, aged 82. Probate of his estate was granted to his widow Sarah and Mary Smallpiece (his daughter who had married Thomas Jesse Smallpiece in 1896). Edmund's address was given as Harefield Cottage, Dormans Land, which may well have been his home since moving to Dormans Land and named in memory of the village where he had lived and worked for many years. (Sarah remained living at Harefield Cottage until her death in March 1913.)

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. Earlier in the year the old gentleman had suffered from rather a severe attack of bronchitis, but he had regained his strength, and was in his usual state of health unto about five days before his death, when he got a chill, which brought about his death, at the advanced age of 82. 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...*"

In 1897 Edmund had been involved in the local celebrations for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897, 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 led to the first 'Dinner to the Aged Poor of Dormans Land' 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 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 the following categories (some of which would not be politically correct nowadays!) - oldest widow, oldest widower, youngest widow, youngest widower, pleasantest looking man, pleasantest looking woman, best male singers, 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*

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*of tobacco and every woman a packet of tea. The party broke up about six o'clock, the old people being very sincere in their reiterated expressions of gratitude."*

The following year, 1901, the local newspaper referred to "The Buffs' Dinner to the Aged Poor", when Edmund was 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 with the landlady, Miss Alice Glover, being 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. As well as the categories mentioned above, prizes might also be awarded for the lady/man who had been a widow/widower for the longest period, the woman who had brought up the largest family, the man with the longest service in the army or navy, the oldest male resident in the parish, the woman who had lived the longest in the parish, the couple who had been married the longest, the man who had the most wives (Edmund might have been a strong contender for this one!), and the woman who had the most husbands. Each year the ladies and men went away happy with their respective packets of tea or tobacco! (How many swaps took place afterwards?)

At some stage organisation of the dinner appears to have passed from The Buffaloes to Edmund as in 1908 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*".

Towards the close of the 1909 dinner (shortly before Edmund's death), Mr Potter proposed "*a hearty vote of thanks to Mr Quickenden for the trouble he had taken in arranging the dinner and collecting the subscriptions*". In reply Edmund stated that

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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*”.

Following his death Edmund’s friends took 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)*

*GRO Indexes*

*Hayward Memorial Local History Centre, Lingfield*

*London Electoral Registers*

*National Probate Calendar*

*UK Census Records*

*Wikipedia*