

The Bank's Cottages

The landscaped area opposite the White Hart pub on High Street, that we know as 'The Banks' used to be occupied by a row of cottages facing High Street. These cottages were owned by the Quorn Town Lands Charity and were rented out to older people, or those in need.

The first photograph was taken in the very early 1900s. You can see that although the pavement was fairly wide, there was a drop of over 3 feet (1 metre), straight down to the road. In about 1906 or 1907, High Street was widened and railings were added to improve safety. The railings can be seen in the second photograph, which was taken sometime before 1910.



As most of us walk along Church Lane and the Church Rooms, past the 1977 Silver Jubilee stone on the grassed area of The Banks, we don't pay any attention to what looks like a fairly nondescript plaque on the back of the stone. This brass engraving actually provides a very interesting background to the history of 'The Banks'. It records:



"THE BANK"

"This area referred to down the years as the 'Bank', was the site of properties which formed part of the 'Quorn Town Lands, the oldest village institution after the Church. The identity of the original donor or donors is either lost in time or was purposely concealed. The title 'The Unknown Donor's Charity' has been applied from time to time.

There is evidence of the Charity existing in 1631. A deed survives dated 17th June 1679 which records the appointment of new Trustees (then called Feoffees) and lists the properties. These included, additional to the



Bank and its cottages, the Village Green, the 'Swines' Green where the War Memorial now stands and other lands and fields. Later cottages in Church Lane belonged, these at one time housing frame work knitters and were referred to as the 'factory'. The eleven original cottages fronting the High Street, were served by a distinctive raised causeway, which earned for them the title 'the cottages on the bank'. In 1950 the Town Lands sold the Bank and its cottages, which were demolished in 1960. The Parish Council moved in to buy the area for the village and this was successfully concluded in 1977, the year of the Queen's Silver Jubilee. The cost of erecting this record was borne by the surplus from the Jubilee Celebrations Fund, in the same way as the ornamental wall at the War Memorial derived from the Coronation Fund."

Note 1: The ancient Swine's Green mentioned above, which was owned by Quorn Town Lands, is actually the land next to the brook in Stafford Orchard

Note 2: The cottages were demolished in the early 1970s, not 1960.

Quorn Town Lands Charity still exists today, although over the years its assets in terms of property holdings have reduced. It now provides modest grants to those in need in Quorn. Details can be found on the Charity Commission website, charity number 216703.

Looking at the 1911 census gives us a fascinating insight into the lives of the residents of these little two-up, two-down cottages. Three of the residents had disabilities and all were single or widowed. All of those eight classed as the 'head of the household', were over 60 years old and four of them signed with a cross because they were unable to write their names.

Forename	Surname	Relationship	Status	Age	Occupation	Birthplace	Any Condition
Eliza	Armston	Head	Widow	66		Quorn	
George Edward	Armston	Nephew	Single	31	Stone quarryman (labourer)	Croft, Leics	
John	Pratt	Great Nephew	Single	24	Framework knitter (hosiery)	Nuneaton, Warks	
Rose Anna	Stocks	Head	Widow	63		Quorn	
Ellen	Johnson	Daughter	Single	43		Mountsorrel	Blind for 8 years
Eliza	Ryder	Head	Widow	73		Quorn	
William	Brown	Son	Single	49	No occupation	Quorn	Totally blind
James	Sheffield	Head	Widower	69	Stone quarryman (labourer)	Quorn	
Harriet	Sheffield	Daughter	Single	30	Housekeeper (at home)	Quorn	Amputated foot
Sarah	Clark	Head	Widow	64		Colorton, Leics	
Nellie	Clark	Daughter	Single	23		Quorn	
Herbert	Clark	Son	Single	20	Apprentice to joiner	Quorn	
John	Foulds	Head	Single	82	Retired gardener	Quorn	
Harriet	Robbins	Housekeeper	Single	81	Retired dressmaker	Quorn	
William	Shaw	Head	Single	65	Road labourer	Quorn	
	Empty						
Elizabeth	Wilders	Head	Widow	69		Barrow on Soar	

By studying the order of the properties on the census returns - in relation to Rawlins at one end, and shops at the other end of the Banks - it is possible to work out who lived where in the row of Banks cottages. It is outside the scope of this article to look at everyone, but it is interesting to take a glimpse into the life of the tenants of just one of the cottages.

In 1911 and earlier census returns, Eliza Ryder and her son William lived in the third cottage along from the Rawlins end of the Banks. They can actually both be seen (only just!), on both of the early 1900s photographs. In 1911 Eliza was a widow and aged 73, William was 49. William is declared as totally blind.

Eliza had had a hard life. She was born in Quorn in 1838, the only child of Warden and Sarah Brown. They lived on Leicester Road, and Warden, born in the village, was an agricultural labourer. Not only would this job have been poorly paid, but Warden was also profoundly deaf and unable to speak. He appears on census returns, starkly labelled as 'deaf and dumb'. This must have been an added difficulty for the family, and despite Quorn Primary School opening in 1834, it is unlikely that the young Eliza attended. There was a weekly charge, which it is doubtful that the family could afford; this is supported by the fact that she never learnt to write her own name, and signed her 1911 census return with a cross. By the time Eliza is 13 in 1851, she is working as a seamstress, but shortly after this, disaster struck, and in June 1854 her father Warden died aged only 50. He was buried in the Parish Churchyard in an unmarked grave. Sarah and Eliza were forced to move from their home on Leicester Road, and found themselves living in a small cottage almost next to the Church. In 1861 Sarah is working as a charwoman and Eliza is working in one of the lace factories in Quorn. At this time there was a lace factory on the site of what is now the Church Rooms. After seven years, it seems as though by 1861 the mother and daughter had settled into their new circumstances, however, this equilibrium was to be short lived. Later that year, the 23 year old Eliza found that she was pregnant. Whilst illegitimacy was not uncommon, it was still a terrible disgrace, and Eliza must have gone through some very troubled times. Her mother Sarah, must have come to terms with the situation, as they continued to live together and Eliza went on to give birth to a baby boy in 1862, and called him William.



The 1871 census tells us that William was attending school, and between 1871 and 1881 Sarah, Eliza and William moved to the cottage on the Banks. When William was 19 he appears on the 1881 census return as an errand boy, but by 1891 he is declared as blind. Sometime in the intervening ten years, something must have happened, but we can only imagine what this might have been. His health or eyesight may have been poor in 1881, as at the age of 19 you would have expected someone in his circumstances to be employed as more than just an errand boy. The 1880s were an eventful period for Eliza. In 1886 at the age of 48, Eliza married John Ryder. He worked at the lime quarry at Barrow. Less than a year later in March 1887, her mother Sarah died, at the age of 76 – this was a very good age in Victorian times. Like her husband Warden, she was buried in St Bartholomew's Churchyard in an unmarked grave. The 1901 census does not add much to our story, although, despite being blind, William's occupation is recorded as being a 'wood chopper'!

After only 10 years of marriage Eliza's husband, John Ryder, died early in 1896. Eliza and her son William continued to live in their cottage on the Banks for the rest of their lives. The picture shows them aged about 65 and 40.

During the early 1970s the Banks cottages were demolished. These unique and rather sad photographs were taken by Richard Thompson. He was then a teenager living on Leicester Road, with a keen interest in photography. They show three views:

- (i) The cottages from the front – the slates and doors have been removed and you can see them piled up against the railings.
- (ii) The cottages from the back, immediately prior to complete demolition.
- (iii) The cottages from the front, almost gone.



The area was left derelict for a long time before it was tidied up. Eventually it was refurbished and renamed 'Jubilee Gardens' in 1977. Shortly after the millennium The Parish Council started to look at the area again, and undertook a major re-landscaping project. 'Jubilee Gardens' was returned to its original name of 'The Banks', and was re-opened officially in 2007. This has now matured into the pleasant area we see today.



So the next time you walk by the Banks, take a minute to look at the plaque, and remember the lives and dramas that went on here in these little cottages.

This article was produced by Sue Templeman on behalf of www.quornmuseum.com. Thank you to Richard Thompson and Don Wix for some of the photographs. If you have any additional information or memories about the Banks, please contact sue@quorndon.com or pass a message through the Parish Office.