

A DORNEY CHARACTER

Browsing through the old newspapers online, my attention was attracted by a report of an incident at Burnham Fair in October 1850. A 90 year old resident of Dorney called Jeremiah Dell had walked up to the fair in the morning with his 9 year old grandson. Described as *“highly respectable”*, he and the boy spent all day at the fair enjoying its amusements, and, it is hinted, he had drunk a few beers.

Towards the end of the day, *“the usual series of fights commenced”* (I am tempted here to point out that nothing really changes – certainly not the long-standing English habit of drinking too much and picking fights). Our hero was obviously feeling younger than his age, and joined in wholeheartedly, with the cry *“Let I go in; stand a one side; let I have a knock at ‘em”*. When the fight was over, he made his way to a pub *“to whet his whistle”*. Unfortunately, when he came to pay, he discovered that his purse had been stolen in the affray.

So, who was Jeremiah? Well, he was born in Burnham in late 1760, the son of John and Sarah Dell. He became a chairmaker, a common skilled occupation in this area, making Windsor chairs, and by 1851 was said to be a master chairmaker employing one man. His employee was probably his son, but nevertheless he was running his own business.

He also served as churchwarden of Dorney for 50 years. In this capacity, he had to appear as witness in a court case in 1844 between Rev Henry Palmer, vicar of Dorney, and his curate Rev George Bull (whom we met last month!).

Jeremiah was living in Dorney by 1790, when the first of his children was baptised there. He and his wife Sarah had 11 children in total. Sarah died in 1836.

The 1841 Census shows Jeremiah living at Dorney Common, with his son Henry, a poulterer, daughter-in-law Mary, and 4 grandchildren aged from 3 to 10. Next door lived another son, John, a chairmaker like his father, with his wife Elizabeth, 4 children, and Jeremiah’s 76 year old sister Hannah. The Tithe Apportionment in 1846/7 shows that Jeremiah owned a pair of cottages – known, appropriately, as Dell’s Cottages – on the north side of Common Road, slightly east of the junction with the road to Boveney, one occupied by himself and the other by his son John. Jeremiah was still working in 1851, and living alone, but still next door to his son John. John’s wife was now shown as a

laundress, another common occupation, as Dorney women laundered for Eton College. Jeremiah's companion at Burnham Fair was probably Henry's son Albert. Henry had moved to Dedworth, where he was farming 30 acres.

Jeremiah finally died on 6 April 1859, aged 99. He left a will, quite unusual in those days, but he needed to pass on the cottages. To many in Dorney, he must have seemed like a permanent fixture, a stalwart of village life. No doubt there were a few laughs at his expense when the locals heard of his escapades at Burnham Fair, and equally some sorrow at his eventual passing.

Jeremiah's two cottages were converted into a single house during the second world war, and is now Dells Cottage.