

Long-term effects of Enclosure – The Haven, Essen Lane

Enclosure of Kilsby's open fields, in 1778, caused major changes in the usage of former farm buildings. Farms that for 800 years had been located in the village (equally handy for all three open fields between which each man's land was divided) were suddenly in the wrong location, for each man's land was now collected together all in one place – and that is why so many new farmhouses and outbuildings were built out in the fields during the 1800s.

Meanwhile, what of the old farmsteads in the village? Poorer farmers continued to operate from their village-based farmhouses – wealthier men built new farmhouses in the fields, converted their former barns into cottages that could be rented out, and partitioned their old farmhouses to provide further tenant accommodation. Fairview (North St) and the Manse (alongside the chapel) are examples of converted barns – and The Haven in Essen Lane is an example of a converted former farmhouse.

I can illustrate this using four scraps of information about The Haven:

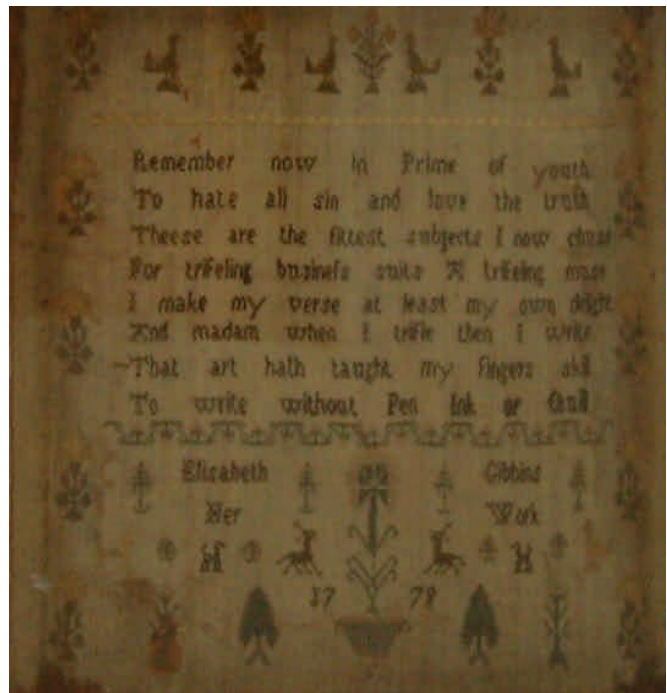
- A needlework sampler, dated 1779.
- Pages from a schoolboy's copybook, dated 1829.
- An 1823 newspaper advertisement
- A "for sale" notice in 1860

The Sampler of Elisabeth Gibbins, 1779

For those who haven't met this term, a sampler was a scrap of linen on which a young girl demonstrated her finest needlework, embroidering little pictures and texts in coloured silken threads to show off her talents.

This sampler was worked in 1779 by Elisabeth, oldest daughter of John Gibbins and his wife Ann (née Lee). It was John Gibbins who built the stone part of The Haven in 1773.

The Gibbinses first arrived in Kilsby in the 1720s or early 1730s, from the Daventry/Badby area, at a time when Kilsby's woollen industry was at its peak. They were woolcombers and wool-staplers, and married into Kilsby's influential Cowley and Lee families, which indicates that they were already relatively wealthy. They took over a small farmhouse near the village centre – a sensible choice of location.



Elisabeth Gibbins was 20 when she stitched this sampler – and 10 years later she married wealthy Kilsby farmer John Roberts and went to live at his house on Rugby Road (now known as Iliff's). The sampler was still hanging in the lounge at Iliff's in 2012 when I photographed it – but I copied the image to the owners of The Haven, to return it to the place where it was created.

The Copybook of John Gibbins, 1829

While re-plastering an upper room in 1997, the previous owners of The Haven found some sheets of paper, dated October 7th 1829 and signed by John Gibbins. They are pages from a child's copybook (used to practice hand-writing), containing carefully

penned repetitions of phrases such as "Lies are despised", "All have a talent to improve" and "Boast not thyself of tomorrow" (Proverbs 27:1).

John was christened at the Independent Chapel in 1819, so was 10 when he copied the above exercises. His three sisters also appear in the Chapel registers from 1810-1825, and the family lived at The Haven. His great-grandfather, also John Gibbins, is listed in Kilsby's Enclosure paperwork of 1778, as a "cottager in Kilsby", ie not a farmer or landowner.

Parts of The Haven were inhabited by other families during the 1800s – notably the Essens (who were related by marriage to the Gibbins family). The property was two houses at that time, and the Gibbins lived in the western end of the cob structure (with its stone-built extension dating from 1773), while the Essens inhabited the older (eastern) end of the building. The 1841 census indicates that the two families worked very closely together, operating a butchery, grocery and drapery:

Ann Gibbins, 77, independent means
Mary Ann Gibbins, 20, dressmaker
Elizabeth Gibbins, 20, grocer
John Gibbins, 20, butcher (ie the author of the copybook)

and next door:

Joseph Essen, 70, farmer
Sarah Essen, 65, grocer and draper
Maria Essen, 40, housekeeper

Roasted Corn, 1823

In the early 1800s, roasted corn was sold as a poor man's substitute for the expensive imported coffee or tea that Jane Austen and other smart folk would have enjoyed at that time. The advertisement on the right appeared in the Northampton Mercury in September 1823 – and one of the sales outlets listed was the Gibbins' grocery shop on Essen Lane.

As you can see, it was produced locally at East Haddon, and distributed through a network of small shops in villages and towns over a 50-mile radius. Advertisements like this shed light on the sort of things that were stocked in village shops in the Georgian era – and it conveys a vivid impression of rows of shelves filled with preserves, hair-curlers, mouse-traps, bags of sugar, candles, balls of string etc.

ROASTED CORN.
THE highly esteemed, nutritive, pleasant, and exhilarating BEVERAGE, made from ROASTED CORN, being very generally used as a Morning and Afternoon Refreshment, in lieu of Tea and Coffee, it is of paramount Importance the Public should be supplied with so useful an Article genuine, of good Quality, and properly prepared; several inexperienced Persons having attempted an Imitation, are endeavouring to vend the most unwholesome Trash, which is only calculated to prejudice those who have tasted it against the Use of any other.
The Roasted Rye prepared by J. GAMBLE, at his MANUFACTORY, EAST HADDON, possesses the Recommendation of being drank by many of the Nobility and Gentry, and by the most eminent of the Faculty.
May be had, Price 1s. per lb. of
Abel, Northampton
Smith, Hall, & Co. London
Gardner, Towcester
Nichols, Guilsborough
Linnell, Spratton
Powers, Harborough
Prosser, Ditto
Haddon, Daventry
Palmer, Ditto
Ward, Leicester
Cherry, Lutterworth
Gibbins, Kilsby
Simons, Birmingham
Brashier, Bedford
King, Higham Ferrers
Crowson, Oundle
Vorley, Thrapston
Jordan, Kimbolton
Chown, Byfield
Bateman, Crick
Lovell, West Haddon
Highan, Brington
Hawthorn, Floore
Edey, Kettering
Bryan, Pytchley
Green, Brixworth
Leman, Clifton

A Property Sale, 1860

On 4th August 1860, the Northampton Mercury carried the following notice:

"To butchers, grocers, and others. To let, and may be entered upon at Michaelmas Day next; A good butchering business, with grocer's and drapery shop attached, established more than half a century, situate at Kilsby, Northamptonshire. Stock and fixtures to be taken a valuation. For particulars, apply to Mr. John Barratt, on the premises aforesaid."

This hints at the humble beginnings of the little shop on Essen Lane – which, from the advertisement, must have started up around 1805-1810. This, in turn, is very revealing

– for the shop was opened during the Napoleonic Wars – a time when poverty afflicted weavers and woolcombers and other folk in Kilsby who had no land of their own to farm.

And now we can complete the story – from a wealthy woolcomber who moved here in the 1720s at the peak of Kilsby’s wool trade and married into the top circle of village society, through the sudden onset of poverty when Industrial Revolution and Napoleonic War combined to destroy the local weaving industry, to the opening of a humble village shop and butcher’s business as a means of survival, to the eventual sale of the premises in the 1860s as a thriving concern.

I could say more – for the story continues into the 1900s – but as usual, space is scarce! Read more about Kilsby history at www.westnorthantshistory.co.uk ...

Gren Hatton,
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