

A Stroll Around Old Freckenham

You are invited to stroll around old Freckenham as it would have appeared seventy to a hundred years ago.

Entering the village from the south on Elms Road, North Street is right then immediately straight on, Mildenhall Road is to the right and The Street to the left. Ahead is the Pound: a lock-up for straying livestock or for beasts found illegally grazing on the commons. The structure was just four high brick walls and a gate, the tree thoughtfully provided to



shade the beasts from the sun. The Pound was demolished in 1948 but the tree remains, at least in spirit, having been replanted a few years ago after the original was killed by the Suffolk County Council's gritting salt carelessly stored at its base.



A closer view of the picturesque cottages behind the Pound. Note the crooked chimney on the end cottage. They were typical of much rural housing in that their charming appearance belied the discomfort of reality. As late as 1933 these cottages still lacked basic sanitary arrangements and a water supply, the latter having to be fetched from the parish pump or the river. Meet Mrs Katie Lister standing outside her home. Originally from Isleham, she came to Freckenham on her marriage to William Lister to whom she bore five sons and four daughters. She loved her flower garden and was an extremely good wine maker, although she still had her daily half-pint from the Golden Boar, usefully situated opposite her house. She was a bit of

a terror with a reputation for not suffering fools gladly. When the cottages became structurally unsound she moved into one of the prefabs in East View. She died in 1950.



Standing on the bridge looking west down The Street with the Bell Inn on the right. In 1873, approximately when this photograph was taken, Freckenham's population was 412 and the village

enjoyed the services of a grocer & draper, identifiable by its distinctive awnings in the first picture and the goods on the pavement outside in the second view, a butcher, two other shops (unspecified), a sub-post office, the Golden Boar Inn, The Bell, the Red Lodge Inn, a blacksmith and a school. Today only the Golden Boar remains (the Red Lodge Inn still exists but serves Red Lodge as a separate parish). Above is the same view some sixty years later, minus the tree outside The Bell, giving some idea of the sleepy rural character of the village. The only life appears to be the two people conversing outside the Post Office and the covered wagon coming from the Fordham Road. Opposite the Post Office is an attractive cottage and garden, which can be seen more clearly below at a different time of year.



The covered wagon travelling westwards towards the Fordham Road may be a gypsy caravan. At the time this photograph was taken local travelling families worked a circuit from Thetford for carrots picking, to Outwell for the strawberries, Chatteris for potatoes and Freckenham for the beet. Until recently strings of three or four horse-drawn caravans were a common sight in the village but the dualling of the A11 forced them to find less dangerous routes and another traditional (and romantic) sight has been lost. Both the cottage and tree have disappeared.



Straight on at the crossroads at the end of The Street to the Fordham Road. On the right is the Wesleyan chapel which was erected in the early 20th century. Many villagers preferred chapel services to church,

because the singing was better and the hymns jollier, but played safe by attending both so as not to upset the parson, a major employer in the village. Before the chapel was built, meetings were held in a large room in the cottage next door. The chapel is now a private house. Opposite is Shores Allotments, part of a charity endowed by Katherine Shore of Lincoln in 1710 to provide cloth for gowns for poor women of the parish. It is now the site of the new Village Hall.

A bit further on and we come to one of Freckenham's two windmills. Both were smock mills, built within sight of each other on high ground to catch the prevailing winds, but on different routes out of the village. The Domesday survey recorded Freckenham with one mill but this would have been water or animal powered. When the first windmill was erected is unknown but there have been successive windmills on the Chippenham Road from at least the early 18th century. In 1735-6 the mill was demolished but another was fully functioning on the same site by 1757. The last mill on that site was demolished sometime around 1910 although its base was still being used for storage seventy years later. The one pictured here was on the Fordham Road and was built around 1823. On the ground floor was the inscription: 'THE FIRST GRIST GROUND AT THIS MILL WAS MR INO (JOHN) NORMAN, FRECKENHAM, JUNE 30TH 1824.' The mill was demolished in 1967.¹



Retracing our steps to the crossroads and left into Mortimer's Lane to admire this charming old cottage. In 1885 a labourer working in his garden uncovered a hoard of over 90 Icenian gold coins, dateable to around AD 0-25, of a rare or formerly unknown type. Most of the coins were sold off but the British Museum managed to obtain a few. The cottage still stands but the house just visible behind the trees at right, Holmes Farm, no longer exists. If we were to continue down Mortimer's Lane we would eventually pass the site of the moat, now ploughed out, but within living



memory the ditch was still filled with water. If we continued onwards until we came to the Isleham Road then turned right and right again we could return to the village via a parallel track leading into North Street. This used to be a pleasant circular walk until a few years ago when the landowner decided to close access to the paths. Prior

¹ Brian Flint, *Suffolk Windmills*, The Boydell Press, 1979, pp. 54, 133, 147.

to Parliamentary Enclosure in 1824, these paths were important and well trodden thoroughfares leading to the Commons and the headlands of the open fields.

Retrace your steps to the to the crossroads and a right turn into Chippenham Road to

Freckenham School, which was erected in 1839 at a cost of £120. With fifty pupils the schoolroom was overcrowded but the problem was not addressed until 1903 when the school was enlarged. The early rules of the school required pupils to be over the age of four, to have short hair, to obtain a ticket of attendance from a



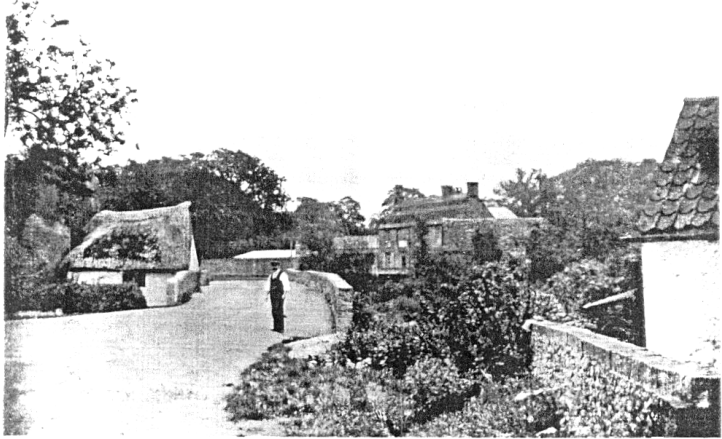
clergyman and to pay a weekly fee of 1d; attendance at Sunday School was compulsory. The school day began at eight forty-five and ended at five in summer and four in winter, with an hour and three-quarters lunch. Holidays were a week at Christmas and four weeks at harvest. The school closed around 1970 and the building was converted to a private house. The Golden Boar can be seen across the river to the right together with the row of cottages with the crooked chimney which we saw at the start of our tour.



Back to the crossroads once more and right into The Street, retracing our steps to the bridge. The third building on the right is the old Reading Room. It was erected in 1894 at the instigation of Wm. Victor Paley and paid for by subscription, as a place where the men

of the village could congregate. Newspapers were freely supplied in a bid to lure them away from pubs and the demon drink. It later housed a lending library and by 1908 it was in general use as the Village Hall. When the new Village Hall was built this was converted into a private house. We can just make out the old thatched forge on the bridge in the centre of the photograph.

A closer view of the forge. Fourteen Tolworthys were blacksmiths here from 1844 until 1879, the last named was a Mrs. Susan Tolworthy but whether she actually wielded the hammer is unknown. The forge went the way of most of its kind with the demise of the heavy horse and it took to servicing machinery instead. It was rebuilt as a two pump garage when this bridge was demolished in 1954. In the centre is the Golden Boar, a sixteenth century timber framed



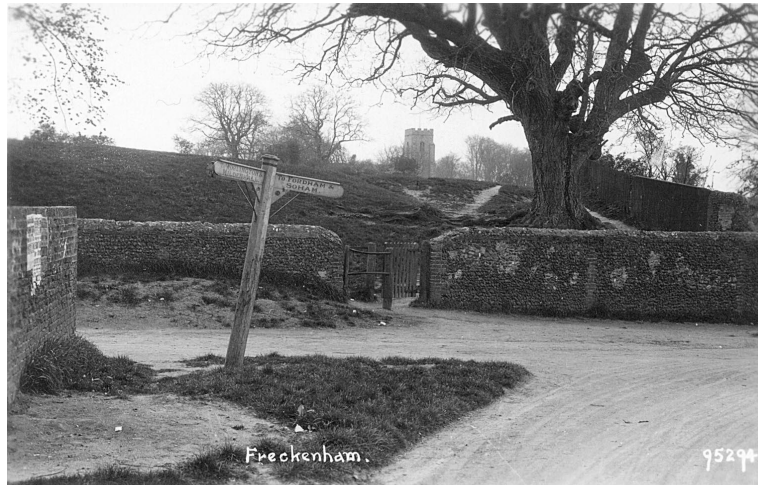
building with a brick skin and later additions. It is listed Grade II and one of the oldest buildings in the village. It may have originally been a watermill as the river Kennet (the Lea Brook) can be seen to have been artificially diverted behind it. Recent refurbishment to the fireplace uncovered three large dressed limestone blocks, decorated with armorial bearings, which were probably taken from a church or an altar tomb. The stones may have come from the chapel of the Blessed Mary which existed in the village between the 12th and the 16th centuries; it was demolished in 1548 when all free chapels and chantries were suppressed by order of Edward VI. Edward Cornell was licensee of the Boar from around 1873 to 1900, thereafter the widowed Mrs Cornell carried on until at least 1912.



Rest for a moment on the bridge to admire the view across the river to the church; this used to be a favourite spot for villagers to gather and gossip in the long summer evenings. The earthworks on Castle Mound are visible at left. The River Kennet, which marks the county boundary, becomes the Lee Brook on its journey through the parish. Now merely a

stream, it meanders through the village to join the River Lark on Freckenham's northern boundary, but once both rivers were important East Anglian rivers, the latter navigable inland to Bury St Edmunds and seawards via the Ouse and Lynn. Swimming in the Brook (still deep enough fifty odd years ago) was a pastime enjoyed by Freckenham children.

Back to the Pound and the old wooden guide post pointing west to Soham and Fordham and east to Mildenhall and Worlington. Beyond is the gate leading to the footpath over the steep rise of castle mound to 'Church Square' and the manor house. Ahead is the great walnut tree, its size indicative of its age,



which must have been well over a hundred years when this photograph was taken. It was one of the six walnuts recorded in Hall Close (the old name for this enclosure) in John Corby's 1815 pre-Enclosure survey of Freckenham Hall estate.



'Church Square', as this part of the village used to be known. The house on the left was once a substantial gentleman's residence. In the 18th century it was owned by William Cropley, then from 1796 by his grandson Edward Palmer and tenanted by William Mainprice. It was sold, as Rumber Hall in 1801. Mainprice, along with his

neighbour and fellow churchwarden, William Westrop, paid for one of the church bells. By the time this photograph was taken the house had been converted into five self-contained cottages. This and its neighbour are distinguished by decorative studwork. Both these beautiful buildings became derelict and were demolished in the latter half of the 20th century.

This imposing building is the rectory. The rear range has a timber framed core dating from the late 16th century, the main body dates from the mid 18th century, and it was enlarged and improved in the early 19th century. In 1699 the Rev. Benjamin Castell (1696-1705) spent £120, equivalent to three or



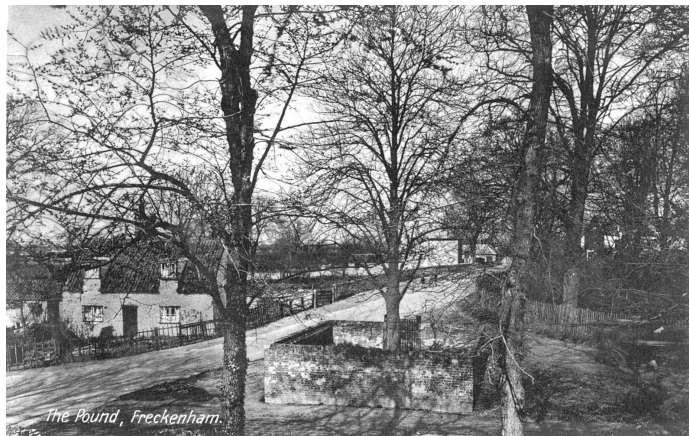
four year's income, on its improvement. The Rev. Michael Smith DD (1760-1773) spent a further £640 on essential repairs and in building the north front between 1760 and 1765; Henry Bates (1773-1816) built 'the small study or wing on the North Front' and in 1829 Samuel Tilbrooke spent £1,180 on 'the whole of the South Front and the offices', including £104 on plumbing, £65 on wallpapering the rooms and 16 guineas for a kitchen range. When the Church Commissioners sold the rectory in the 1970s a large part of it was demolished to make it more convenient for modern living.



St. Andrew's church, seen here from the Rectory lawn, was constructed between the 13th and 14th centuries on the orders of the bishops of Rochester, in limestone and flint, consisting of a chancel, nave, north aisle and chapel. The west tower was added in the 15th century. The Rev. George Paley undertook substantial repairs and alterations in 1867-9, including rebuilding the south porch.

The thatch was replaced with slate in 1870 and the tower was rebuilt in 1884, two years after it had collapsed.

If we return to the Pound by way of the footpath across castle mound we can see the remains of a medieval motte and bailey castle. The motte mound is heavily shrouded in trees but still stands about fifteen feet high. It has substantial stone and flint foundations below ground which have yet to be excavated. Sledding down the earthwork was (and still is)



a winter pastime enjoyed by generations of Freckenham children. From this perspective we can see inside the Pound with its entrance gate behind the tree. To the left is Pound Cottage and just visible through the trees at right are two cottages which stood on the corner of North Street and Mildenhall Road.



A closer view of the cottages at the top of North Street and Mildenhall Road and home of the Markwell family, two of whose

children are standing behind the wall. A modern bungalow now stands on the site.

We end with a view of the Mildenhall Road, probably taken from Freckenham House entrance. Until the council houses were built in the 1930s, it was very rural, bordered by Scots Pines, having only seven other houses along its length: a gothic cottage identical to the one still existing in North Street, a row of five cottages on what is now East View and Clunch Cottage, the only building still remaining.



*Text Sandie Geddes,
Photographs: Mildenhall Museum, Kay Gee, Harold Wiseman,
June Entwistle, Louise Pieters, Sharon Cunningham & Emily Markwell.*