

DOWNINGS YARD

Situated at the very centre of the village, Downings Yard has a long and varied history. Most people living in Fishlake will have heard of Downings Yard even though, as an address, it no longer exists, but how many have heard of Smiths Yard?

This article starts in 1825, with an extract from the 1825 Hatfield, Thorne, Fishlake and Stainforth Inclosure Award Map, which shows a group of properties (circled) fronting Town Street in Fishlake.



Town Street has had many names over the last 200 years. Town Street became "The Street" before becoming the "Main Street" as we know it today.

Fishlake Hall lies to the west and the triangular area of land, now the site of one of the village crosses, lies to the east.

The street scene in 1825 would have looked very similar to the scene shown in the photograph below, although this was probably taken around eighty years later.

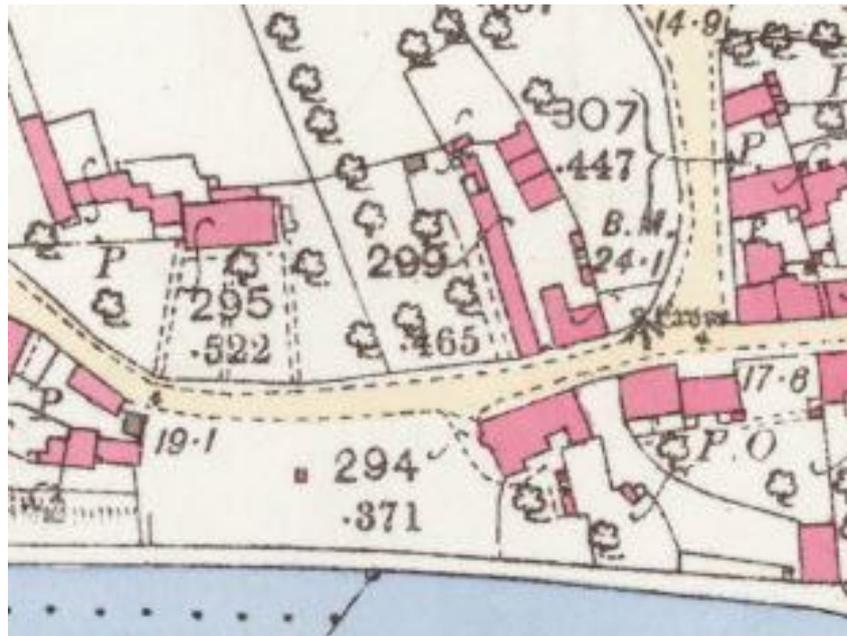


On the left of the photograph is a double gate leading to "The Chestnuts", the building once used as a butchers shop is next door and then there is a large house fronting Town Street. The entrance to Downings Yard lies between these latter two buildings.



The photograph above shows the opposite viewpoint – the large house is now on the right-hand side.

The 1893 Ordnance survey of the area - extract below - gives a better indication of the layout of Downings Yard before redevelopment.



There is one large L shaped house on the frontage, nearest the cross (and known as “The Cross”, four cottages to the immediate rear and a range of buildings on the western boundary adjacent to what is now known as “The Chestnuts”. Today only the back half of these western boundary buildings survive, the front half having been demolished and replaced at various times over the past 200 years.

The Smiths Square name, not unsurprisingly, is linked to the property owners. In 1871 the Square was owned by a Jane and Thomas Smith – Thomas being described as a farmer of Foster Houses (now Fosterhouses).

According to the census return in 1871, Smith’s Square comprised 7 cottages – six occupied, one empty. The building fronting Main Street - No 1 Smiths Square – was occupied by the Cowen family, James Cowen, aged 42, his wife Elizabeth, aged 34 and their seven children. James is described as a police constable, born in Ireland and Elizabeth as a policeman’s wife, born in Meltham West Yorkshire. It would seem that James and Elizabeth had a peripatetic life – their eldest child was born at Meltham near Huddersfield, the next two were born at Crosland Moor, now a district of Huddersfield, the next two were born at Rossington, near Doncaster and the two youngest at Fishlake. It would seem from the age of the children, that the family moved to Fishlake in 1867/68.

The census then goes on to describe the occupants of six more cottages; four were definitely to the rear of No 1 and in my opinion; the other two formed part of the range of buildings on the western side of the plot. It is impossible to state definitively who occupied what building with any degree of certainty as the census returns merely relate to “Smiths Square”, and the numbering on the census may bear no relation to the persons registered

Other occupiers were:

No 2 - Henry Box, aged 69, born in Sykehouse, agricultural labourer and his wife Ann, aged 68, born in Fishlake and described as "agricultural labourer's wife. Also living at home was their unmarried son, Bendigo Box, aged 29, born in Fishlake, who was described as an agricultural labourer.

No 3 – Mary Strawson, a widow, aged 73, born in Fishlake and described as a widow "In receipt of Parish Pay". These, of course were the days before state pensions and it was not uncommon for older people to be given "outdoor relief" as opposed to enduring the more oppressive regime of the workhouse.

No 4 – Sarah Gray, a widow aged 72, born in Greasbrough and described as a former domestic servant.

No 5 – Richard Langhorne, aged 43, described as a butcher and labourer, born in Heck, Yorkshire and his wife Betsy, aged 41, born in Crowle and described as a butcher's wife. They lived with their five children, all born in Fishlake

No 6 – Susannah Simpson, aged 53, unmarried and described as a schoolmistress, born in Middlesex, London. Of course, at this time schoolmistresses were required to be single but why would a woman born in London now live in Fishlake, Yorkshire? She is registered in the 1851 Census as living in Hatfield, near Doncaster with her parents – her father was born in Hatfield, so that explains the local connection. Her mother was born in Somerset.

No 7 – described as an unoccupied dwelling.

In 1871 therefore, the occupiers of this group of buildings are a fairly typical of a small rural farming community.

Two of the buildings on the western boundary of Smith Square were occupied as dwellings but at some point, the front half became used as a butchers shop with a storeroom for the grocer's shop (on the opposite side of the road) immediately to the rear. The earlier photograph shows the shop front.

On the 28 May 1873 Smiths Square, along with other property nearby was sold to Joseph Downing (described as a butcher of Keadby in the parish of Althorpe, Lincolnshire). Unfortunately, no plan is attached to the document, merely a schedule, from which it's possible to conclude that the conveyance included the grocers shop on the opposite side of the road (the old village shop and post office), the site of The Chestnuts to the west and the whole of Smiths Square. On 12 July 1878 Joseph sold off the grocer's shop, the buildings on the western boundary of Smiths Square (two of which had been used as dwellings) and the The Chestnuts site to William Downing. Joseph Downing retained the cottage fronting Main Street (The Cross) and the four cottages to the rear.

The 1881 census reflects the change in ownership. Smith's Square is now described as Downings Yard. From this census Downings Yard comprises five, possibly six houses, occupied by the tenants of Joseph and William Downing and none described as vacant. Mary Strawson, and Sarah Gray, were still living there, as was Susannah Simpson – she was still working as a schoolmistress.

Also registered on the census for Downings Yard were:

- Leonard Simpson, farm labourer, born at Branton, Doncaster, his wife, Elizabeth, born at Fishlake, and their son,
- Joseph Cooper, farm labourer, his wife Elizabeth, and their seven children.
- Robert Walker, aged 49, retired woollen cloth dealer (although he was only 49), his wife Ann, both born at Armley, Leeds and their 3 children. My best guess is that this entry refers to the larger house fronting Main Street.

From the 1891 Census return it appears that the larger property fronting Main Street was still occupied by Robert Walker, his wife Ann, one unmarried daughter and a grandson. This house is registered as "The Street", not Downings Yard.

Also registered at Downings Yard were:

- Henry and Harriet Shaw, and their two unmarried daughters
- Hannah Peniston, who was described as single and a pauper.

Two further dwellings were registered as unoccupied. The 1891 census, for the first time, also requires the registration of dwellings with less than five rooms so we get some indication of the size of the properties in Downings Yard. The two occupied are described as having four rooms – so basically 2 up and 2 down. The one fronting Main Street is not mentioned so must have had at least five rooms.

Unhelpfully no definition of what was classed as a room was given until the 1911 census - until then it was up to individual interpretation. The 1911 census counts a kitchen as a room but not a scullery, landing, closets, or bathrooms, nor offices, warehouses or shops.

By the 1901 Census four dwellings are registered as Downings Yard and the occupants are:

- Elizabeth Lomas, widow, born in Thorne, who was described as an Annuitant (someone who receives a fixed amount of money each year usually until their death). She lived with her unmarried son Arthur Lomas, aged 29, born in Sheffield and described as a canal worker, navy.
- Hannah Peniston, is still living there although she is now described as a retired field labourer rather than a pauper.
- John Wake, born North Moor, Oxfordshire, described as a navy and his wife Mary, born in Cawthorne, Yorkshire, and their 3 sons
- Henry Stapp, aged 51, born in Fishlake, described as a navy.

Of the four properties registered as Downings Yard, 3 are noted as having 4 rooms but the one occupied by Henry Stapp is smaller – only 3 rooms.

The property on the frontage of Downings Yard is occupied by Samuel Anderson, general labourer, born in Wendling, Norfolk and his wife Sophia Anderson, born in Fishlake.

For the first time there seems to be a shift in employment – two of the occupiers are described as navvies and this reflects the upsurge of canal building in the area at that time.

The 1911 Census registers four properties as Downings Yard – I am unable to identify the occupants of the dwelling on the frontage to Main Street, but the occupants of Downings Yard were:

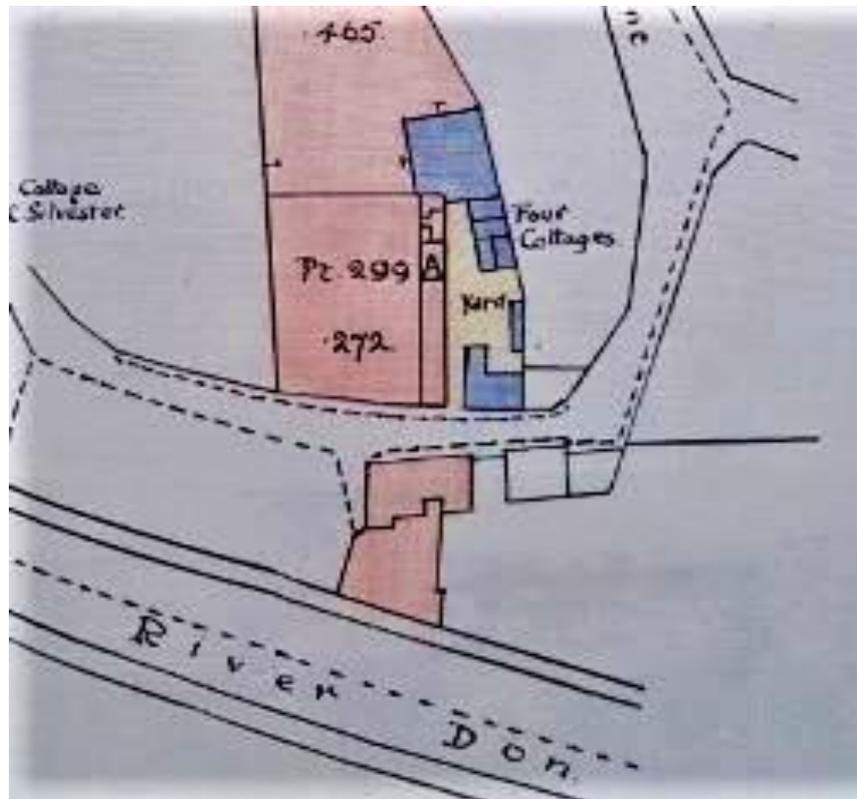
- Elizabeth Lomas and her unmarried son, Arthur, a general labourer. She is now described as in receipt of a private and pensioner (old age). The Old Age Pensions Act introduced a pension of between 10p and 25p per week to people aged 70 or over. This came into effect on January 1st 1909, which is known as Pensions Day. You could only receive this pension if you were deemed of "good character".
- Lily Holmes, widow, born in Fishlake and her three children (all born in Denaby, Yorkshire). Lily was supported by "private means". Lily was only 31 years old and her children were 9, 6 and 5. There is obviously a story behind her return to Fishlake.
- Mary Ann Rinder, aged 81, widow living on private means, born Sawley, Northamptonshire.
- Harriet Walker, aged 78, widow living on private means, born Everthorpe, Yorkshire. 4 rooms

These buildings would appear to be the block to the rear on Downings Yard and all are registered as having four rooms, which doesn't tie up with the information supplied in the 1901 census, but as mentioned earlier there was no standard definition of "room" until 1911.

On the 29th June 1916, William Downing sold the buildings on the western boundary to Fred Thompson Downing.

On 19 June 1925 the Sheffield Daily Telegraph reported that an Arthur Lomas, aged 53 of Downing Street, Fishlake (Downings Yard certainly went up in the world!) was "yesterday knocked down by a horse and run over by the vehicle it was drawing". He was admitted to Doncaster infirmary with injuries to his chest and foot.

On 07 June 1931 Fred Thompson Downing died. At the date of his death, he was described as being, formerly of Goole but lately of Northallerton and a retired grocer. On 03 December 1931 his executors sold the same block of buildings on the western boundary to Frank Downing along with other land and premises including the grocers shop on the opposite side of the road – see plan on the next page.



At that time the front part of block of property on the western boundary of Downings Yard was being used as a butchers shop by John England and also part of the block was occupied by a C. Sylvester (the building marker "A" on the plan). The property was sold subject to rights in common with the owners/occupiers of the land coloured blue to use the common yard coloured yellow and the common privies. At that time the cottages would have had outside lavatories, connected to a septic tank.

The 1939 Register gives us the most up to date census information available at the current time. The 1939 Register was taken on 29 September 1939. The information was used to produce identity cards and, once rationing was introduced in January 1940, to issue ration books. Information in the Register was also used to administer conscription and the direction of labour, and to monitor and control the movement of the population caused by military mobilisation and mass evacuation.

It tells us that the occupiers of the building fronting Main Street, were the Hepton family. Charles Hepton, aged 48 was working as a colliery shaft man and he was married to Ethel, 46. Their children, Ernest and Clifford, (both waggon repairers) and Doreen, (described as at school) also lived there.

There were five other households living in Downings Yard:

- George Gray, aged 33, single, described as a colliery bank hand
- Arthur Lomas, aged 68, single, retired labourer and James Creighton, a widower, aged 61, described as incapacitated.
- Joseph Lighton, a widower, aged 57 and described as a Colliery Screen Hand (above ground). He lived with the Wilby family- Horace Wilby, aged 33, his wife, Florence, aged 31, and their son Basil, aged 13 and another (closed record)
- Harriet Downes, a widow, aged 67.
- John Bell, a widower, aged 77, retired

So again, all four cottages in the rear yard and one dwelling in the western block were occupied. It's interesting to note the change in occupations. The opening of the collieries at Stainforth and Thorne provide better paid alternatives to agricultural working, Coal mining was not a reserved occupation at the start of the war and as the war progressed there was a great shortage of coal miners. Consequently, starting in December 1943, one in ten men conscripted was chosen at random to work in the mines.



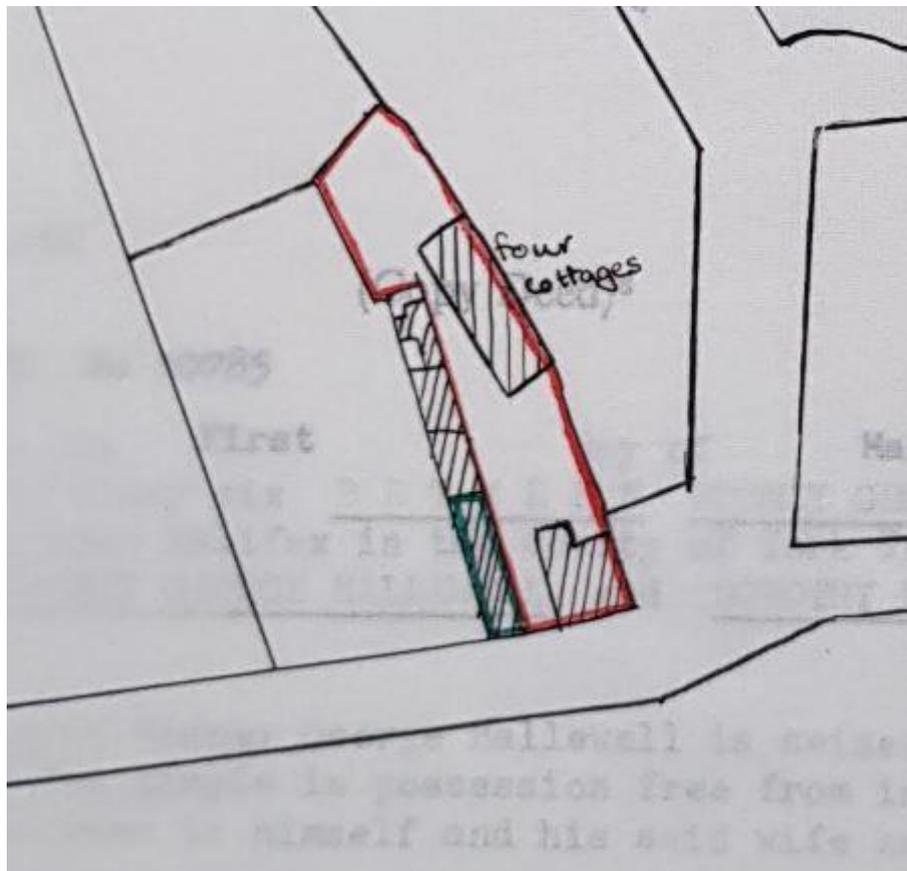
The photograph above, taken in June 2018 shows the cottage occupied by C, Sylvester referred to in the 1931 sale. The photograph below shows the rest of the block.



The Yorkshire Post on 23 September 1954 reported that “Two 70 year old occupants of a car were injured last night in a collision with another vehicle in Hallgate, Doncaster. They were Ethel Mumby of Downings Yard, Fishlake (head and chest injuries) and Frank Downing of The Chestnuts, Fishlake (wrist injury). Both were allowed to go home after treatment. “

By 1956, Alice Downing, of The Chestnuts, owned the cottages on the eastern side of Downings Yard and on her death on 04 December 1956, the property was inherited by her husband Frank Downing. On 25 February 1957 Frank Downing became the owner of the whole of Downings Yard. That conveyance is interesting in that it lists the occupiers of the cottages as C. Hepton, and Messrs E. Mumby, F. Hill, H. Travis, and Mrs Waite. It also lists the owners of the land surrounding Downings Yard as Frank Downing to the north and west and Mr A.A. Hopper of land to the east.

On the 30 May 1965 Frank Downing died and the buildings shown on the plan below were on 28 March 1966 Downings Yard was sold to Allen Ernest Davis, a butcher, of Mawson Green Farm, Sykehouse



Allen Davies purchased the five cottages (edged red) and what was described as a butchers shop and double storehouse (edged blue). At that time the house on the frontage was still occupied by Mr C. Hepton but the cottages in the rear yard were vacant except for No 3 occupied by a Mr and Mrs Wain. Allen Davies was the tenant

of the butchers shop and the double storehouse was rented by a Mr K. McDermid, who ran the village grocers shop opposite this site.

The next photograph is taken in the yard behind “The Cross” – the property fronting Main Street. Left to right - Clarice Omar, Frances Omar (mother of Clarice), Doreen Hepton, Mary Hepton. Thanks to Karen Howsam for the photograph.



Clarice Reubens was born at The Cross and remembers the butchers shop at the entrance of Downings yard – “adjacent to that was a storage barn for Downings shop over the road, then there was a big wash house with a big mangle and a copper that you lit a fire underneath to boil the water. There was a sink under the window and a big dolly tub and dolly legs which the four cottages used. My granny (Hepton) had her own copper in the back kitchen (The Cross) which was filled every Sunday night and my grandad lit the fire under it when he came home after working night shift at the pit. The water was boiling ready to start washing after breakfast come rain or shine and my mam used to help my granny to do the washing.”

The picture on the next page is Clarice Omar taken in the entrance to Downings Yard. It is also the only photograph I have been able to find of the cottages to the rear of The Cross. The ivy tree seen over Clarice’s left shoulder is still there today and immediately adjacent to it is the storage barn which Clarice refers to and the butchers shop – both now demolished.



In August 1973 The Cross was demolished – see picture below, but I am unsure when the cottages to the rear were demolished.



On 30 November 1979 Allen Davies sold the site to Keith Milnes who had worked for him since July 1967. Keith Milnes continued with the butcher's business and in 1993 built a new butchers shop on the site of the old cottages. He began trading from there in 1994 and continued until he retired on 31 October 2015. The property

became vacant and Louise and Claire Holling decided to take on the premises and turn it into what is, today, a thriving café business.



I do not know when the old butchers shop was demolished but in 2004 what remained of the store (used by the village shop) to the rear was demolished, and a new two storey building constructed – Pure Beauty salon opened in February 2005. In 2006 the building was extended to the front to form a kitchen and first floor treatment room. That business was subsequently sold and on 05 August 2016 a new hair and beauty salon, Juxtapose was opened.



Hairdresser & Butcher Shops

2012



August 2020

I hope you enjoyed reading this article. If you have any information which could add to this article please do get in touch via the Fishlake History website:

<http://fishlakehistorysociety.uk>. or mail me on fishlakehistorysociety@gmail.com.

Carole Smith

January 2021