

Tales of the Thornton Family.

The white cottages near the cemetery, sometimes called colloquially “ the White City,” were originally stables, where Squire Schutz left his horses during church time.

Later they were sold.

Michael Thornton, who died in 1856, became the owner of the second cottage and later of the first cottage, and he enlarged both. He married Miss Elizabeth Sumner.

The first white cottage became the village post office and shop, and Michael Thornton’s son William, who was born in 1816, became post-master, letter carrier, shop-keeper and boot and shoemaker combined. He would go round with the letters in the morning, and then come back and make shoes. This was over sixty years ago, and he always wore a tall hat, as did other men in the village at that time.

The door of the front bedroom upstairs is faced with wall panelling from the old Manor House. There used to be more panelling from the Manor House in the cottage, but it became damaged.

Later William Thornton bought the third and fourth cottages also.

In the second cottage lived Miss Ann Thornton, William Thornton’s sister, who was a great character in the village. Her mother had kept a dame school, and, after her death, about the year 1853, her daughter took it on. Miss Thornton had one room, which she used as a bedroom, kitchen and school combined. There was an old-fashioned oval table, round which the children sat. Under the window, which looked up the garden, there were chairs for two more children, some of the others used forms, and the lower steps of the stairs accommodated three. There were 14 or 15 pupils, at the most 20. Her fees were 3d. a week. School began at 9 or 9.30, and a passer-by remembers overhearing her say in sharp, precise tones, ‘ P-R-A-N-K—prank. Do you know your lesson?’ She had an open fire place. Up the chimney she kept a holly stick about six feet long. If a child misbehaved, she would fetch the stick, and, with it, could tap a child even sitting far away. She never tapped cruelly. There was a hole in the floor with a board over it. When a child read out of the Bible it used to stand over the hole. If it did not know what it should it was tapped fairly hard with the stick. Sometimes she used to box the children’s ears, but it was only a tap. Now and then, if the little girls were naughty, she would pin them to her apron.

She would look after the children out of school hours if the parents were at work. She was paid a little more for this, or, perhaps, bread and butter would be given if the children stayed all day. They used to do odds and ends for her, such as going into the lower garden and picking up wood and chips to light her fire. In the afternoon the children were taken out wooding.

Miss Ann Thornton was considered a good teacher and she had a good handwriting. She taught so thoroughly that, what the children learned, they never forgot. She also kept a night-school.

Over her lovely grey hair she wore an old-fashioned cap indoors, and a sunbonnet out of doors, and on Sundays she wore a best poke bonnet. Towards the end of her life she used to be given her Sunday dinner at the Vicarage.

Miss Thornton was spoken of in a friendly way as “ old Ann Thornton.” One day she overheard someone say “ There is old Miss Thornton.” Promptly she turned round and exclaimed : ” There is nobody old but the devil.”

She grew herbs in her garden, and elsewhere, in this book, it will be seen she was known for her remedies. Her cooking pot still exists.

At one time these cauldrons were largely used for cooking potatoes, with a few herrings laid on the top. The herrings would be eaten by the parents, and the taste would mingle with the potatoes for the children. This formed a common meal during the difficult times known as the “ Hungry Forties.”

The post-master, William Thornton, had three sons. When he died the post office was left to his eldest son William, the third cottage to the second son, Joseph, and the last cottage to the youngest son Benjamin. On condition that the property was valued, and divided equally among her nephews, Miss Ann Thornton left the cottage she lived in to the second son Joseph, who had it pulled down and rebuilt by his friend A. G. Harris. No scaffolding was used, and the cottage was built from the inside outwards. The passage dividing it from the third cottage became part of the second cottage, which was brought into line with those on either side, since which time the cottages have formed a continuous row.

A curious experience befell the second son long years ago.

When he was a boy of eleven Mr. Bolton of Bolton's Farm (now Red Hill Farm) died, leaving a widow, and a daughter who was a widow also. They were uneasy at being alone in the house at night, and, for quite a long time, young Joseph Thornton used to go down there to sleep. The first night he was put into the best spare bedroom, with solid old furniture around. He saw a Bible lying near, so he read a chapter. Then, before he blew out the light, he turned, and, to his amazement, there, lying on the bed, was old Mr. Bolton, dead. It gave him a great start, but, after a few moments, he blew out his candle, got into (the same) bed, and went to sleep ! Next morning, when he reached home, he asked his mother whether Mr. Bolton had died in his own room or in the best spare bedroom. " What's that got to do with you?" asked the mother. " Never mind, I want to know " said the son. " Well " replied the mother " it was in the best spare bedroom that Mr. Bolton died."

The boy never saw the apparition again.



Mr. Joseph Thornton, son of William Thornton, and his Daughter.