

SOME 19TH CENTURY DEDDINGTON CHARACTERS

Deddington in the 19th century was in some respects a place in decline: its population in 1901 (c.1500) remained what it had been in 1801, an apparent stability that disguised a relentless flow of emigrants seeking a better life elsewhere. Life for many in Deddington was hard indeed. Despite, or perhaps because of that, the place abounded in interesting families and individuals. A few of the less familiar merit our attention.

Deddington's role as a market and service centre brought professionals to live here. Notable among them was **Charles Duffel Faulkner** (d.1871), Coroner and temperance advocate, whose reputation as an antiquarian earned him election to the Society of Antiquaries. He rebuilt the house called the Priory, in Hudson Street, including on the upper floor a museum in which to display his collections free to the public. They were dispersed to various museums at his death, but some remarkable fossils survive in the grotto that he built across the street from his house, the building being used in the 21st century by Cyclogical.

Joseph Wilkins (1820–91) of The Stile was a self-taught signwriter and artist now best known for his remarkable bird's-eye views giving a unique insight into the topography of the area. His bird's-eye view of Deddington made c.1865 introduces us to another character of that period, **John Knibbs**, who died in 1901 at the age of 94. The view contains a local joke at John's expense, noted by Mary Vane Turner in her *Story of Deddington* (1933): when looking closely at the original, one can see the Deddington Rifle Corps 'drawn up by the town hall, while away far off in St Thomas's Street is their drummer, beating the big drum, quite alone'. The joke is given added point if you know that the errant drummer, John Knibbs, was also ale taster to the manor court!

The **Stilgoe family**, farmers and millers, is perhaps the longest established in Deddington, recorded from the 16th century. The family house (now Orchard House) in Hopcraft Lane bears dates of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. It is worth noting that most farmhouses were then in the village, outlying farmhouses mostly being built after enclosure in 1808. Nathaniel Stilgoe farmed mainly at Souldern and Adderbury but lived for the latter part of his life in Deddington. He was a great friend of the **Revd Cotton Risley**, vicar and self-appointed squire of Deddington, who relied upon him for farming advice. Nathaniel's brother Henry was the first Stilgoe to farm at Adderbury Grounds Farm, which is still in the family's occupation.

Finally, this is a good opportunity to lay to rest a tenacious myth that **William Bowler** (b. 1808), for whom the eponymous hat is named, lived for a time in New Street at Eastleigh, now Bowler House. It seems that later members of the family lived there but never William himself. Even worse, the *New Dictionary of National Biography* questions William's very invention of the bowler hat, his part in the creation being the manufacture of the stiffened felt used in the hat's manufacture. Is nothing sacred?

Chris Day