

*A REPORT ON LOCAL VILLAGE
SANITATION AND CONDITIONS IN
c.1870*

*THOSE WITHOUT PROPERTY AND WEALTH
SERVED THOSE WITH IT AND WERE
DESERVING OF CHARITY*

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - OCTOBER 2020

PART 1

A REPORT TAKEN FROM THE LONDON ECHO – APRIL 1877

Like many others, I went out of town at Easter. Eschewing the hackneyed haunts of Hastings, Margate, the Isle of Wight, and other seaside resorts, I struck out a new line, and made for the Midlands. Leaving St. Pancras for the Trent Station, I travelled by the Ashby Railway through a fertile district, and visited such out-of-the-way places as will be indicated by the names of **Griffy-Dam, Lount, Tonge, Breedon Brand, Breedon, and Worthington**, and I propose to narrate some of the things we heard and saw there.

It is not my intention to attempt a description of the natural features of the country, although much might be said in praising of the charming varieties of hill, and dale, and wood. My concern is more with some of the blots which the cupidity of man has succeeding on making on the fair face of creation. One of the first things that attracted my attention as I drove along was the ruinous condition of the cottages and buildings. Roofless, doorless, windowless, are terms which convey but a faint idea of the actual condition of the things. Some are tenanted and others are tenantless, but they are alike ruinous and miserable.

My first impression was that I had landed on one of those estates whose ownership has been the subject of litigation in the court of Chancery for generation after generation. But on enquiry I find that it is not so. The country here for miles around belongs to the “**great man**” who succeeded to the estates of a late Marquis, of unhappy celebrity in the racing world, and who has considerably increased the number of his broad acres by the purchase of adjoining estates.

So struck was I with the utterly wretched condition of the cottages, that I put up at a roadside inn, and made a personal inspection of such as were conveniently within my reach, in order to satisfy myself that human beings were absolutely existing in such wretched and shapeless heaps of old bricks, decayed timber, and rotten thatch. The first cottages I approached formed a block of three, and if there can be a difference where all are so bad, they appeared to be a little better than the rest. The approach to these cottages was through filth of every conceivable, and even the most disgusting description. Lest our olfactory nerves should not make the discovery, a rustic, touching his cap, said, “Mind where you put your foot, Sir”. The roofs of the outbuildings had fallen in years ago, and the walls were in a dangerous condition. Water closet there was none, and what had once formed an apology for one had long been in ruin. A man whom I accosted informed us that these cottages belonged to the “**great man**”, and that he, the tenant, would willingly give the labour if the landlord would supply the materials necessary for the most urgent repairs.

Passing onto another block, I find the same, or even worse, state of things existing. Piled up at the end was a great heap of ashes and refuse, the accumulation of years, and similar heaps existed here and there along the public roadway. Such was the dangerous state of these cottages that it was a marvel any tenants could be found to risk their lives in them, and yet they were tenanted. An old woman in one of them said they were also the property of the “**great man**” who would not spend a penny on them. They had not been so bad when her old man could work, but he had grown old, and so the shed had tumbled down, and the pigsty, and the washhouse, and the cottage looked as if it would speedily follow. The roof was so bad that in heavy rains, the water poured on to the bed in streams, but they managed to keep their heads dry by a tea tray suspended from the rafters. She thought the house would last her time – it would not be long. She was seventy-eight and her old man a little older – eighty-three. She had reared a large family in the house and did like to leave the old spot, but it was very hard to end their days in that fashion; yet the owner would not help them, and they could not help themselves, and so they were like to bide a little longer until the end should come.

I made enquiry in the neighbourhood and found that these were only specimens of many more, and our hearts sickened at the thought. We have often been told, in that hackneyed phrase, that the property has its duties as well as its rights; but where is the power to enforce the duties while the rights are exacted?

It is the boast of conservatives that the present Government has improved the sanitary legislation of the country; and, lo ! these evils still remain. It is true that in one of the sanitary districts here, where there is an active inspector, some good work has been done – cottages have been demolished, cesspools which overflowed into the wells have been removed, and drainage works are being done. But in the other district, the weak point of the Public Health Act of 1875 has been revealed. True, there is an inspector, but he is appointed by the Board of Guardians, and has to be elected annually. To them he has to report, and they determine what summonses shall be issued, and what works shall be done. But alas ! the Chairman of that Board is the land agent of the identical “**great man**” who owns the property where these nuisances exist. It does not require the wisdom of Solomen to forsee what in nine cases out of ten the result of such an arrangement would be.

Musing on these things I pursued my way, and presently came to the domain of another **great man**, where large sums of money have just been lavishly expended on stabling for his stud and kennels for his hounds. In these erections the most sanitary arrangements have been adopted, and no expenses has been spared to make them light, airy, and healthy. As I looked on that picture and on this, I said alas ! alas ! not that horseflesh and dogflesh should be so well and carefully tended, so comfortably housed and fed: but that our fellow-men – the bone and sinew of England – should be left to suffer and die in hovels and sheds regarded as utterly unfit to shelter the animal creation.

PART 2

References to “**great men**” are made in the above emotive report and it is only right that an explanation be given of who were these great men?

The “**great man**” referred to in the last para of the report would have been –

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE SEWALLIS EDWARD SHIRLEY – 10TH EARL FERRERS, VISCOUNT TAMWORTH, AND A BARONET

The 9th Earl was succeeded by his son Sewallis Edward Shirley, 10th Earl Ferrers (1847-1912), at twelve years of age. Maybe his succession to the title at such a young age had an influence on the later excessive style in which he apparently lived his life. Under the 10th Earl, the Ferrers entered an age of unparalleled excess which caused severe financial hardship for those that followed. John Fox in his book entitled “Staunton Harold”, tells us that in the 53 years that he was the head of the family, the 10th Earl had a great effect on Staunton Harold and the family's fortunes, and was the last member to live in great style, his footmen having powdered heads and wearing silk stockings, with silver horse shoes on their sleeves.

Leicester Chronicle – November 11th 1876

STAUNTON HAROLD - EARL FERRERS HOUNDS – A pack of fox-hounds is kenneled this season at Staunton Harold, and on Monday the spirited owner commenced hunting. The hounds are said to be first class, fast, musical?, and selected with care and judgement. His lordship's stud, 20 in number, contains, it is stated, some perfect hunters, well-bred, in perfect condition, and fit for any days hunting that may present itself. His huntsman, Gilson, from the Quorn, will, no doubt, give a good account of himself during the season. The two whips – Tasker from the Meynell Ingram Hunt, and Goddard from Mr. Musters' – are said to be bold and daring riders. The turn-out on Monday – ten in pink, with the hounds, and hunters in new saddlery – on the lawn in

front of the mansion, was a pleasing site. A splendid breakfast was given, to which all did ample justice, and the hall was filled with guests, including the elite of the neighbourhood. The day's sport was not so good as might have been expected. Numbers of pedestrians were present, and interrupted the getting away of the foxes, one of which was killed and another run to ground. [The kennels are newly built, and contain every convenience for the hounds. The stables are extensive, and replete with every requisite for the stud. The next meeting will be at Donington Park.](#)

Leicester Chronicle & Leicester Mercury – January 1878

| THE HUNT. | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| QUORN HOUNDS.—At 11. | |
| Saturday, Jan. 12, | Swithland Village. |
| Monday, Jan. 14, | Ragdale Hall. |
| Tuesday, Jan. 15, | Copt Oak. |
| Friday, Jan. 18, | Keyham. |
| Saturday, Jan. 19, | Wymeswold. |
| DUKE OF RUTLAND'S HOUNDS.—At 11. | |
| Saturday, Jan. 12, | Scrimshaw's Mill. |
| Monday, Jan. 14, | Denton Hall. |
| Tuesday, Jan. 15, | Haverholme Priory. |
| Wednesday, Jan. 16, | Stonesby. |
| Friday, Jan. 18, | Weaver's Lodge. |
| MR. TAILBY'S HOUNDS.—At 11. | |
| Saturday, Jan. 12, | Allerton. |
| Monday, Jan. 14, | Shearsby. |
| Thursday, Jan. 17, | Ilston. |
| EARL FERRERS' HOUNDS.—At 11. | |
| Monday, Jan. 14, | Kegworth Station. |
| Friday, Jan. 18, | Worthington. |
| ATHERSTONE HOUNDS.—At 11. | |
| Saturday, Jan. 12, | Corley. |
| Monday, Jan. 14, | Sutton Cheney. |
| Wednesday, Jan. 16, | Cricketers' Inn. |
| Friday, Jan. 18, | Brownsover. |
| Saturday, Jan. 19, | Horse and Jockey, Bentley. |
| COTTESMORE HOUNDS.—At 11. | |
| Saturday, Jan. 12, | Leesthorpe. |
| Monday, Jan. 14, | Ashwell. |
| Tuesday, Jan. 15, | Langham. |
| Wednesday, Jan. 16, | Manthorpe. |
| Thursday, Jan. 17, | Bull, Witham Common. |
| Saturday, Jan. 19, | Beaumont Chase Lodge. |
| PYTCHLEY HOUNDS.—At 10.45. | |
| Saturday, Jan. 12, | Badby Wood. |
| Monday, Jan. 14, | Sywell Wood. |

The report describes the other “**great man**” in the following terms*The country here for miles around belongs to the “great man” who succeeded to the estates of a late Marquis, of unhappy celebrity in the racing world.....*

Henry (aka Harry) Hastings at the age of 9 became the new 4th Marquis of Hastings achieving his majority in 1863. His main claim to “infamy” was to squander a fortune on the race track suggested to be equivalent to at least £25 million today! By 1868, when he died, he was apparently ruined in health and a pitiful sight.

The great Hastings’s estate had to be broken up, but Donington Hall and park remained in the hands of the Hastings, only through the determined efforts of the 4th Marquis of Hastings wealthy sister Lady Edith. Through her marriage to Charles Frederick Clifton (awarded the title of Lord Donington in 1880), they assumed the surname and arms of Abney-Hastings, purchased the reversion of the 4th Marquis’s English estates, paid off his debts, and took up residence at Donington Hall.

PART 3

Obviously over a period of some 25 years or so. some improvements regarding sanitation must have been made, but the following newspaper article does not make for good reading in respect of Griffydam.

Leicester Journal – March 27th 1896

ASHBY DISTRICT AND PARISH COUNCI

ASHBY. – The monthly meeting of the rural district council was held at the **Workhouse** on Saturday afternoon, when Mr. J. H. Joyce presided, - The Surveyor reported that he had received notification of three cases of Scarlet Fever and one of Perpetual Fever at Swannington, one of Scarlet Fever and one of Typhoid fever at Coleorton. The new sewer at Ravenstone was working satisfactorily, and progress was being made with the drainage at Mr. Garners cottages at Netherseal. ***He had made a house to house inspection at Griffydam. The sewer from a house and shop belonging to the late Lord Donnington and from the four cottages belonging to Mr. Wale discharged into the road, and the sewage allowed to stagnate there. There was no system of drainage in this part of the village, There was a field about 150 yards away where a tank might be placed. At Pegg's Green the sewage from several cottages ran into a field near the roadway. A tank could be placed within a short distance of this field.***

Like Coleorton, a mains drainage system was not installed in Griffydam till the 1960s, and the author recalls that it was a familiar site around the local villages in the 1940s to see the men with their special lorries equipped with tanks fitted with top sliding doors into which the pans or buckets placed under the wooden seats in the outside privies were emptied. When the tanks were full, these were emptied into the pits across from the New Inn, Pegg's Green.

