

HARTHILL'S OLDEST COUPLE

“Ah yes, I was born in the days of George the Fourth and I have lived to see the days of George the Fifth. I did not expect to, for I hoped King Edward would have lived much longer. God bless his memory, God bless the new King!”

This was a long speech, for Mr. George Flowers, the oldest man in Harthill, to make; for, unlike so many of the present generation, he is not given to prodigality in the matter of talking. The conversation took place in the cosy, little, old-fashioned cottage in Hopping-lane, Harthill, which he and his wife have occupied for goodness knows how long. Inside, the cottage is as neat as a new pin, and it was palpable that Mrs. Flowers, despite the burden of near four score years, still practises those housewifely qualities of which all home-keeping women are justly proud.

Mr. Flowers was born at "Chapel Anston," that is North Anston, in 1827, and Mrs Flowers is a native of "Big Markham," otherwise East Markham, and will be 80 years of age in July next. They have been married 56 years, and thus celebrated their golden wedding six years ago. They were married at Anston Church by the late Rev. T. Rowbotham, the late Mr. T. Battye being Parish Clerk, an office of consequence in the days of George IV, and his immediate successor. They have had twelve children, of whom seven are living, all of whom are doing well, and, like their parents, are deservedly held in high respect. There are 32 grandchildren, and eight great-grand-children.

So far as life's occupations go, Mr. George Flowers' story presents little out of the common. One of a numerous family, he soon had to set to, and from his youthful days until a few years ago. When advancing age asserted itself, he has gone forth cheerfully to his labour until the evening. For a number of years he worked in the Quarry at Kiveton Park for the late Mr. John Holmes; and he well remembers the activity which prevailed got from Anston quarries, now worked by Messrs. James Turner and Sons, for the Houses of Parliament.

Subsequently he took to farm work, first at Dinnington, and then for Mr. Fretwell at Woolthwaite, Tickhill, and later, on the sinking of Kiveton Park. Colliery, he betook himself to coal mining.

Naturally, Mr Flowers has a very distinct recollection in the days of its sweet rusticity when there was no railway, no colliery, no long rows of houses, and scarce a cottage between Dog-Kennel Quarry and Wales, when the "cut," or canal, was a busy as a crowded highway, and when old King Coal was not suspected of having territory in the neighbourhood. The sinking of the pit made a vast difference. Men flocked from far and near, and labour was at a premium. Among others the worked attracted Mr Flowers as he had to consider the claims of a big family, and so he donned the miner's garb. For twenty years and more he worked in the pit once having a most narrow escape from a fall of roof, and finally ceased work twelve years ago since which time he and his good wife have taken things more easily, as is the happy privilege of honest and respectable old age to do.

Nothing very eventful, perhaps in Mr. Flowers career, but grandeur need not read with a disdainful smile this short and simple account of a long life spent in honest toil. But very

eventful were Mr Flowers' recollections of the "bruisers of England" who exhibited their valour on Lindrick Common. The old man's face lighted up when asked if he had witnessed any of the great battles at this favourite of the pugilists, and with something like the ardour of earlier days he answered that he had and he recalled with gusto the names of some of the heroes, of the ring whom he had seen.



Mr & Mrs George Flowers

These included such bye-gone worthies as Molyneux, the black, who had been specially imported to fight that true piece of English stuff Tom Cribb; the great Bendigo, Ben Caunt, "Hammer" Lane, the Tipton Slasher, and "Tass" Parker, to name no other exponents of the noble art. To listen to the old man was like reading a page out of that strange medley "Lavengro." Borrow delighted in pugilism. He knew the time when a pugilistic encounter between two noted champions was almost considered in the light of a national affair; "when tens of thousands of individuals, high and low, mediated and brooded upon it, the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night, until the great event was decided. Let no one sneer at the bruisers of England. What were the gladiators of Rome, or the bull-fighters of Spain, in its palmiest days compared to England's bruisers. Pity that ever corruption should have crept in amongst them — but of that I wish not to talk; let us still hope that a spark of the old religion, of, which they were the priest still lingers in the breasts of Englishmen:"

And just as Borrow describes the meeting of the champions at which he was present, so one

could imagine the scene on Lindrick Common where Mr. Flowers saw Bendigo and Caunt face each other: in the ring. "The men of renown, amidst hundreds of people with no renown at all, who gaze upon them with timid wonder." Cribb, the champion of England, fought upon Lindrick Common, so, too, did Teucer Belcher, "the most scientific pugilist that ever entered a ring." So, too, did the terrible Randall and the doughty Ned Turner; the fearless Scroggins, the Bull-dog Hudson, and Tom, of Bedford the mighty one.

Mrs. Flowers smiled with approbation as her aged husband recounted the scenes of his early days. She, too, had her reminiscences of the pugilists, although, of course, she had never seen them fight, and would rather have shrunk from witnessing such a spectacle. When a girl, however, she resided at the "George Inn, Worksop, with a Mr. and Mrs. Swinton, and she remembered what excitement there was among the sporting fraternity of the town, and for miles around because Bendigo and Caunt had made the "George" their headquarters preparatory to fighting a great battle on Lindrick Common. She well-remembered seeing the men as they marched up and down the inn yard that morning, what muscles they had, and what terrible looking fellows they were. And she could remember perfectly well how nervous was the beef she cooked for their breakfasts was overdone.

"And how did the fight end, Mrs. Flowers, and what became of the men? Did they return to Worksop?" we asked. But, bless you, we would have been far better to have asked her the prevailing price of provisions in Worksop at that time for the good lady knew no more of the fight than seeing the men.

Mr. Flowers took up the story, and said the favourite spot for the bruisers was below Moses' Seat. People flocked to the encounters from miles around, high and low, rich and poor. Of course, prize-fighting was supposed to be illegal, but it was winked at and sometimes magistrates who came ostensibly to put a stop to the proceedings remained to see the fight through. In Mr. Flowers' opinion prize fighting on Lindrick Common declined with the establishment of the Police Force. Nobody took any notice of the old Parish Constables, but, my word! The Peelers made things different.

Another sport, now almost obsolete, which was common enough in Mr. Flowers' younger days, was cock-fighting. "I have witnessed many a score of mains, he said. "Anston was a great place for it every Saturday night. Then there used to be cock-fighting on Lindrick Common, and then they used to go off to the Dale Inn. But it's been done with now; bless you, this many a year." And 'a good job too for cock-fighting was a cruel sport, nearly as bad as rabbit coursing, and worse than pigeon shooting, which the degenerates of to-day pursue with such avidity.

Mr and Mrs. Flowers, therefore, have seen many changes in the habits and customs of the people in the course of their long and respectable life. When they were young, the children of the humbler classes got precious little schooling, and worked very long hours for little money. They lived on what some people of to-day could not exist on; and they have brought up a large family respectably and well. They are honoured in their old age by all who know them. They are deeply grateful at the thought that they been spared any long illnesses. Indeed, with the exception of a short attack of influenza, Mr Flowers has enjoyed wonderfully good health, and as they go down the vale of life together, their many friends join in the hope that the separation will not come about for many years to come.