

DOWN MEMORY LANE

A Tale of Two Houses. 25 and 27 High Street North...when it comes to historic buildings, appearances can be so deceptive.

At a casual glance, the two red-brick village homes at Nos 25 and 27 High Street North appear to be semi-detached Edwardian properties built as a pair at a peak of demand for new village housing. It's obvious, isn't it? There's even a terracotta plaque on No 25 indicating the building date of 1904. However, the truth is very different as they were built quite separately 30 years apart.

The story begins with today's No 27, which back in the 1870s was No 25. In the 1861 and 1871 Censuses, one Joseph Dickins, a wheelwright, was living at Wood Hall (*today's Dean Road near to the Bletchley/Mursley crossroads*). By the time of the 1881 and 1891 Censuses, Joseph Dickins was living with his family at what was recorded as the 'wheelwright's shop', to the north of Hounslow's shop (*which was No 23 High Street, although the local authority had not yet started numbering houses on the High Street.*) In 1877 Joseph fathered a daughter, Gertrude, whose birth was recorded at 25 High Street North, so we can assume that this was also the street number of the recently built 'wheelwright's shop'. Gertrude appeared again in the 1891 Census, aged 13 and a scholar, still living in the same location.

The large brick outbuilding to the former No 25 featured in November 2023 *Grapevine* as the premises of the successful wheelwright business of Joseph Dickins' sons Alfie and Teddy.

(Editor's note: I do hope you are keeping up with our detective story!?)

Meanwhile, one William Edward Stonhill, born 1875, and in 1891 apprenticed as a baker, was living in lodgings with the Mead family further north along the High Street. Very conveniently, William married 'the girl-next-door' Gertrude Dickins in 1897, and in 1904 he built the present No 25 High Street North, semi-detached and adjoining his in-laws' home, with a bakehouse premises at the rear.

The original No 25 (the Dickins' home and wheelwright's shop) became renumbered No 27, as it is today. This association explains why for many years the only access to the rear of No 25 was from around the back of the in-laws at No 27.

William and Gertrude's son Owen, born at No 25, continued the master baker's business on the premises. William passed away in 1950 leaving the not inconsiderable sum of £2,669 in his estate to Owen and his sister Dorothy, proving that where there's bread there's brass!

Although these substantial Stewkley red-brick semi-detached homes look as though they may be contemporary, there are significant architectural differences, with No 27's yellow brick quoins and detailing, and No 25's dressed stone window lintels and ground floor window bays.

Sadly, No 27 presents an unhappy face to the High Street today. Because of their local historic importance, the pair were given candidate status in 2023 for Buckinghamshire's Local Heritage List.



Dickins' wheelwright shop at 27 High Street North



25-27 High Street North with bakehouse at rear of No 25