

Herbert John Finn (1843-1922)

[Actor, about 55-65, dress ~1890 wealthy, accent – maybe traces of Suffolk]

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I can see you're wondering about the angel. She's beautiful, isn't she? I had her imported from Italy, you know, for my wife Margaret – just as beautiful and she passed away so young. How could it happen? Again? I was so busy with the brewery, I didn't notice that her health was failing and I should have done. You see it had all happened before. Maybe this was my punishment?

My name's Herbert Finn, Herbert John Finn. I spent all my life in brewing. I started off by moving from Kent to Ipswich in Suffolk, where I was apprenticed at the Ipswich Steam Brewery. The owner of the brewery was Charles Cullingham and he looked after me really well, him and his wife Eliza. It turned out I had a real talent and was a good judge of brews, and barley and hops. When I asked to marry his oldest daughter Elizabeth he was delighted (there were seven others by then!) and offered to make me a partner in the business. We were married in 1872, bought a lovely house with a garden and conservatory and had three healthy children: Cordelia in 1875; Marion in 1877 and Dudley Charles in 1880 – I think that's right.

I was busy in the brewery making new brews, and beginning to be active in the town and church as well. Indeed I was a Churchwarden then. We never really knew what ailed Elizabeth. She started to feel ill and took to her bed. We called the doctor who told us her liver was inflamed, hence the jaundice, and she just faded away.

So suddenly there I was with three young children, Dudley not yet two. Yes we'd had servants but Elizabeth did all the childcare herself. The Cullinghams all offered to help but Margaret, then only 24, gave up her employment as a governess and gradually took over the care of her nephew and nieces. She was easy to have around and I counted myself very lucky to have her as part of my household.

The children loved her and after I had recovered from the loss of Elizabeth I began to look forward to spending my evening hours with her after the children were in bed. It felt right for her to be there. And the obvious next step was for me to marry Margaret.

But there was one enormous problem. At that time (and up until 1907) it was illegal to marry your dead wife's sister! I took spiritual guidance whilst carrying out my church duties and also talked to my father-in-law Charles, also, of course Maria's father and there seemed no way forward. We either carried on as we were, which seemed almost immoral, or Margaret returned home and gave up caring for the children she loved.

The only way to evade this legal impediment was to follow in the steps of others, who had circumvented this restriction by marrying abroad, for instance the Pre-Raphaelite painter

William Holman-Hunt. When we were considering doing that Charles was taken ill with a stroke. It incapacitated him for a while after which he told me of his decision. He wanted to sell all his businesses and properties and from the proceeds give me my share so that Margaret and I could start life again as a married couple where we were not known.

I was there with Charles at the auction in London. It was very exciting – though I'd rather not go through that again! To begin with no-one seemed interested. No bid at all for two minutes, it seemed like an eternity. Then gradually the bids started. At £63,000 the hammer was just about to fall when a new gentleman interposed and went on to purchase the Brewery and all its freeholds, copyholds and leaseholds for £65,300 on behalf of Hon Ranulph Tollemache the 10<sup>th</sup> son of Lord Tollemache. What a relief!

Thinking back the Tollemaches looked after it all well. They expanded the business, eventually in 1957 combining with Cobbolds brewery, known as Tolly Cobbold, till 2002. Ridley's took them over and they still sell Tolly beers. I wonder if they are my old recipes?

After the Brewery business was wound up I sold my house and then Margaret, the children and I stayed for a while back in my family area of Kent. We married February 10<sup>th</sup> 1889 – in London where nobody knew us. I admitted to being a widower but as far as St Philip's Church was concerned Margaret was a spinster.

Then it was a case of waiting for a Steam Brewery to become available and it did in Newbury in 1893. The Phoenix Brewery just down the road there and I was able to buy it. Margaret was still only 35 when we came here. We moved into The Brewer's House, and I started making changes. It felt wonderful to be back in the brewing business again after so many years waiting.

I converted the beer house into offices and the malthouse into a store for grain. I moved the malting process out to the King's Road. We had our own transport, a large dray and a two wheeled cart, with horses of course so it was easy to move the malted grain here.

In 1893 of course everyone drank beer – children as well. It was usually safer than water. We used water in the brewery but we never called it 'water' – we called it 'liquor', always, but it came out of the well, pulled up by a triple pump and we used lots of it – to make steam- it was a steam brewery – ha!

The steam powered all the parts of the Brewery, the pumps, the grinding mill, heating the copper, keeping the fermenting tuns at the right temperature for the yeast to work. The steam was made in the Cornish Boiler on the ground floor – right next to the well – and then was piped up to the Middle Floor where we had an old engine a 1865 single cylinder horizontal steam engine to be exact, which powered all three floors of the building. That way we didn't have to employ so many men and were able to keep it profitable. In fact six other Newbury breweries had packed up by the end of the Great War, there were only four of us left.

Though I wasn't much use by then – I'd been bedridden for years but my son Dudley did a good job keeping everything going well.

Mind you it wasn't just about making the beer, every brewery had what's called tied houses. That's pubs which sell the beer you make. The Phoenix Brewery had 29 tied houses, all part of the purchase price. Some of them are still around – and still called the same – haven't changed their names in all these years.

The nearest is 'The Wellington Arms' – just down at the roundabout (what a good invention they were!), and further down Bartholomew Street 'The Globe'. And out in the country 'The Blackbird' at Bagnor, The Carpenter's Arms at Burghclere and The Angel at Woolhampton – maybe that's where I found my inspiration for this angel?

I worked my men hard but we tried to be fair. They did a six day week – had Sundays off to go to church. 5.30 in the morning till 7.30 at night. They had a couple of breaks for dinner and tea and they had a beer ration – a pint four times a day, the first one at six in the morning, to perk them up for the day. All except the poor apprentice. He was our taster so his palate had to be pure, poor lad!

And we gave them presents too, Margaret used to like to help with this. They'd line up on Christmas Eve, and Good Friday for bun money. And when the Michaelmas Fair came they all got a shilling to spend at the Fair.

Of course though I gave the men time off to go to church I never did once we came here. I'm not sure if I was angry because the church law made us leave all our friends and Margaret's family behind in Suffolk or if I had a bit of a guilty conscience.

Margaret and I didn't have any children of our own, it just didn't happen. But she was a real mother to Cordelia, Molly and Dudley. She was a bit older than Elizabeth had been when her health started to fail. I didn't take it in to start with. She had pains in her belly and then she started to swell up all over. The doctor tried some strange treatment called Southey tubes – dreadful. She was so ill. It was a merciful release but she was only 43.

Was it a punishment for us breaking the law? Of course we wondered about it but neither of us regretted what we'd done. Dudley was 21 so he had had a really loving childhood albeit with his aunt and not his mother. Margaret was an angel every bit as beautiful as this one.

Thanks for listening to an old man's ramblings. It always helps to remember.

Ros Clow March 2012