

COLNE HOUSE, OBSERVATORY HOUSE, BROOK STREET



The 1841 census for Benson lists Mary Ann Powell living in what became known as Colne House and later Observatory House on Brook Street. The house was owned by Thomas Powell, her uncle, and retired coachmaker, who was resident in what became known as Kingsford House in High Street.

Later, Richard Powell, nephew of Thomas Powell lived in Colne House with his second wife, Esther (Peirce) and Mary Ann Powell Corsellis, his sister-in-law. The 1901 census shows Mary Ann Corsellis, a widow aged 80, still living with her sister-in-law, Esther Powell, a widow aged 65, in Colne House with two servants. Esther and Mary Ann both died in 1905. Mary Ann left £200 for the poor of Benson (Powell gift) in her will.

In Kelly's Directory of Oxfordshire in 1907, Frederick Isherwood is listed as a private resident living at Colne House in Benson. By the Kelly's Directory for 1911, Colne House is in the occupation of Cecil Stafford Northcote.

In 1914, W. H. Dines purchased and moved to Colne House which he occupied until 1939. He christened the house Observatory House because he was one of three generations of his family who were meteorologists and contributed much to the advancement of British Meteorology from the 1870's until the Second World War. Much of this work was done at Benson.

Observatory House was demolished in 1972 and the development, which replaced it, was named Observatory Close.

Mr W H Dines, who lived at the Old Observatory, Brook Street, Benson, from 1914 until his death in 1927 was a distinguished meteorologist. Being of independent means, after taking a mathematical degree at Cambridge, he was able to devote most of his life to the pursuit of his hobby, meteorology. He became well known early in his career from his invention of the Pressure Tube Anemometer which was adopted as the standard instrument for measuring the wind in this country and was used also in many places abroad. Later he became even better known for his exploration of the upper air, first by means of instruments carried by kites and later by small balloons which reached a height of ten or twelve miles before bursting and allowing the instrument to return to earth.

He pursued this work at his home near Watlington and later during his residence at Benson. In recognition of his work he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1905, an honour much coveted by British scientists. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society and served on its council for many years, being elected President for two terms of office. His reputation was international. He was of a retiring nature and though well known in London scientific circles he did not take much part in village life or local affairs.