

JEREMY BENTHAM AND DOLLIS FARM

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In The Hendon Times¹ for 21st October 1960 was an article written by A G Clarke of the Mill Hill and Hendon Historical Society, about Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who lived at Dollis Farm in Mill Hill East between 1788 and 1792. Bentham was one of England's greatest thinkers, a citizen of Revolutionary France, a prison reformer, a philosopher, and coiner of many new words, (*international*, *minimise* and *maximise* to name but three.) Dollis Farm, demolished in 1932, was on Holders Hill Road. It can be seen on an ordnance survey [map](#) of 1914 where the flats *Lanta House*, *Royal Court*, and *Hendon Park Cemetery* are today.

Bentham did not like to socialise. Generally he preferred the company of animals, particularly the cats and pigs of the farm. He needed to rent the room in Mill Hill to get away from London whilst he wrote (his principle source of income). In 1788, Bentham had recently returned from a visit to his brother Samuel in Russia. Our article writer, A G Clarke, went through the letters of Bentham for references to the farm or Mill Hill. Bentham describes the farm in one letter to his brother as *"decently furnished with tapestry hangings, large carpets and immense tables. The great inconvenience is the terribly low ceilings."* In another to friends, he describes the farm as *"homely state as you could well conceive"* and of the fields of Finchley and Mill Hill, *"It is a very pleasant country, and being all in grass the delights of haymaking continue five or six weeks."* (in the 18th century, haymakers would come to the area mostly from Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and London to cut and stack the hay, doubling the local population for a couple of months).

Samuel Bentham returned to London in 1791 and on his arrival, was invited to stay with his brother at Dollis Farm. The invitation suggested that Jeremy would meet Samuel at Highgate and walk back via East Finchley. There is enough description of the route for us imagine which way they went and even share what they might have seen. *"About a mile and half beyond Highgate you will come to a nursery ground; at the top of the hill is the Bald Faced Stag, at the bottom before you get to the Bald Faced Stag is the White Lion. Close to this is a stile that goes to Finchley."* The chosen path was moved with the building of the railway in the 1860s, from about midway between the two inns to behind East Finchley Station and it now leads to the Hampstead Garden Suburb and the Causeway. From here they would have walked along East End Road, past the Five Bells inn (c1751), past Bibbesworth Manor house (1722), up Gavel Hill, at the top of which is Park House (1730s) and through the churchyard of St Mary's with its 18th century gravestones carved with skull and crossbones. Then they would have walked down the footpaths and forded the Dollis. We will never know what they chatted about on their walk. It was from this time that they began to work closely on a new idea for a radical type of prison, the [Panopticon](#). It may have been that they chose this route to discuss, discreetly, the revolution in France.

Jeremy and Samuel Bentham's father died in 1792, leaving them both financially independent and Bentham left Mill Hill at this time. In later life, Jeremy Bentham remembered with some regret the joy of living in the farm. It was an idyllic spot until the suburbanisation and even into the 1960s people could remember the Nightingales that sang in the area. Renting the room in Dollis Farm enabled him to listen to the noise of the household without being involved in particular. It was his favorite cat that Bentham missed the most.
