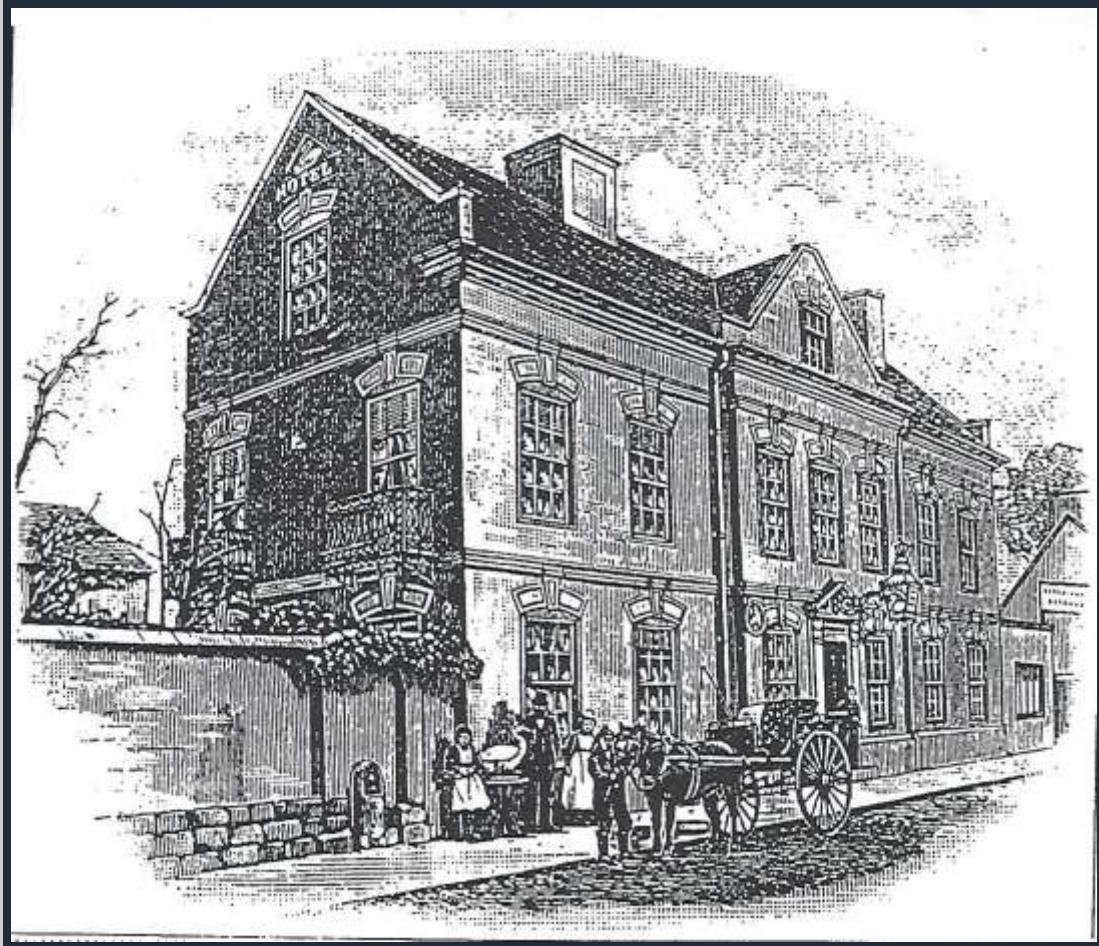


# William Morris Grundy

(1806-1859)

Sutton Coldfield's Famous Photographer/Artist



The Swan Hotel, High Street, Sutton Coldfield, once home of the Grundy Family  
Picture taken from G. Sidwell & W.J. Durant's Popular Guide to Sutton & Park 1893  
(Sutton Library Ref:SH97SUT)

Perhaps the reason why William Morris Grundy, Photographer/Artist, is not well known in his home town of Sutton Coldfield is because little has been recorded of his private life. However, what records there are of him have been kept by Sutton Coldfield Library over many years and it is therefore possible to piece together the calibre of the man who lived in High Street and who made such an impact on the photographic world of the 1850s.

It was his undoubted consummate skill at his craft that catapulted him into the public eye for just a few years around the time of his death in 1859.

His work is now scattered throughout the world and thousands of pounds are paid when his photographs change hands. Many of these can be seen on the Internet simply by searching against his name.

Grundy lived in a large house, the name of which has changed regularly. In the late 1800s, after Grundy's death, it became known as *The Swan Hotel* and then *The Royal Hotel* for about a hundred years after that. Nowadays, it is known as *The Townhouse*.

In the mid-1800s, various techniques in photography were being explored, amongst which was an invention by William Henry Fox Talbot called *calotype*. This was a photographic process by which a large number of prints could be produced from a negative (see William Henry Fox Talbot's Biography, <https://victorian-era.org>).

This process obviously interested Grundy and there are several newspaper reports available on <http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/> recording social events for which he had loaned copies of his own *calotypes* for exhibition, eg:-

**Aris's Birmingham Gazette, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> October 1855**

*The Members of the Society of Arts gave a converzatione at their rooms in Temple Street. The interest of the meetings was considerably enhanced by the exhibition of a portfolio of drawings signed by Mr David Cox and a collection of excellent calotypes by, we believe, Mr Grundy of Sutton.*

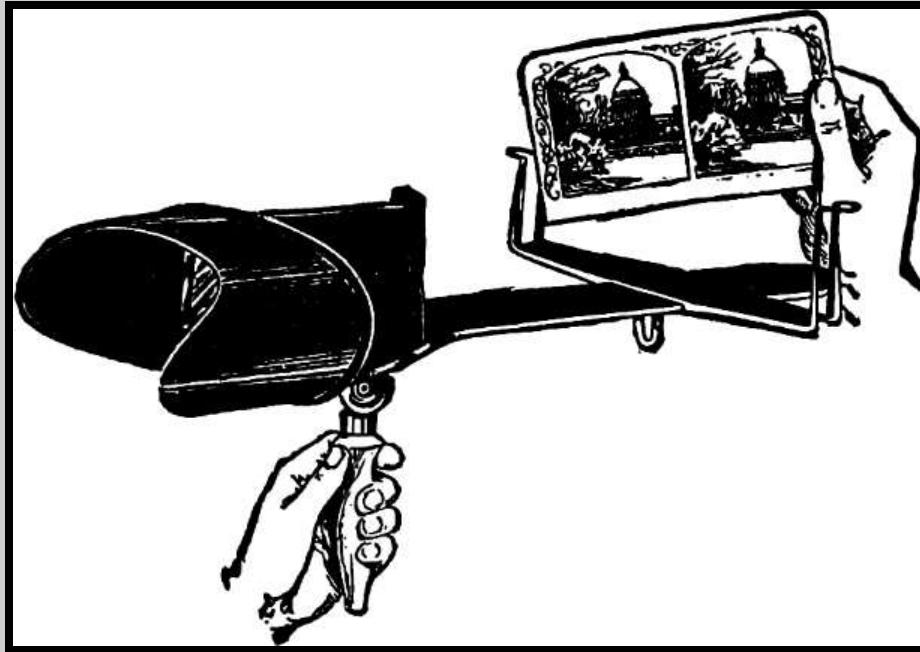
**Aris's Birmingham Gazette, Monday, 28 January 1856**

*Mr Underwood's Soirée – On Friday evening between four and five hundred ladies and gentlemen assembled at Dee's Hotel, to inspect a large number of drawings and prints arranged by Mr. Underwood. The collection included Mr. Simpson's and Signor Bossoli's drawings of scenes in the Crimea, sketches by Roberts, Standfield and other eminent artists, and a large number of Calotypes, kindly lent by Mr. Grundy of Sutton Coldfield. These calotypes excited the greatest possible attention throughout the evening, and from their extraordinary merit richly deserve the praise so warmly bestowed upon them.*

**Birmingham Journal, Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> September 1857**

*The examples of picture making by the process contributed by Mr Grundy are of great excellence as compositions and as pictures.*

Advances in photography moved apace in the 1850s and one only has to look at the website detailing photographs exhibited by William Morris Grundy in Britain between 1839-1865 ([www.peib.dmu.ac.uk/](http://www.peib.dmu.ac.uk/)), to see that he was also extensively using a process called *collodion*.



Stereoscope ([www.vintagegraphics.ohsonifty.com](http://www.vintagegraphics.ohsonifty.com))

However, as far as Sutton Coldfield is concerned, his greatest achievements are his *stereoscopic* photographs. These can be likened to a system we use today when watching a film through a viewer, whereby two slightly differing views of the same picture are seen together producing a 3D effect. They would have been viewed through an apparatus called a *stereoscope*.

As a rule, his photographs were of a posed rural scene depicting everyday activities carried out by agricultural labourers, fishermen or farmers, both men and women being represented. Some of these, almost certainly of Sutton Park, were used in 1861 to illustrate a volume of poems called *Sunshine in the Country, 1861* (Sutton Coldfield Library Archives Old Reference LC821.9).

Grundy's ability to create this type of photograph was not the primary reason for the book's popularity or his renown; it was the meticulous compilation and set up of the subject matter which was considered to be near perfect.

This picture (taken from [www.sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/101-articles-1-40/1872-william-grundy-31.html](http://www.sclhr.org.uk/history-spot/101-articles-1-40/1872-william-grundy-31.html)) looking across Mill Street, Sutton Coldfield to the first Town School, c1855, is a rare example of his *stereoscopic* photographs.



After he died from Tuberculosis on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1859, the originals of most of his photographs were purchased by the London Stereoscopic Company. These are now in private hands. Unfortunately, it is said, his remaining negatives were thrown into a pool after his death!

The following COLLECTION OF 'GRUNDY' PAPERS is a miscellany of useful material intended as an aid to future research. These documents are gathered together here as a means of keeping that work in one place.

Janet Jordan  
Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group  
August 2022

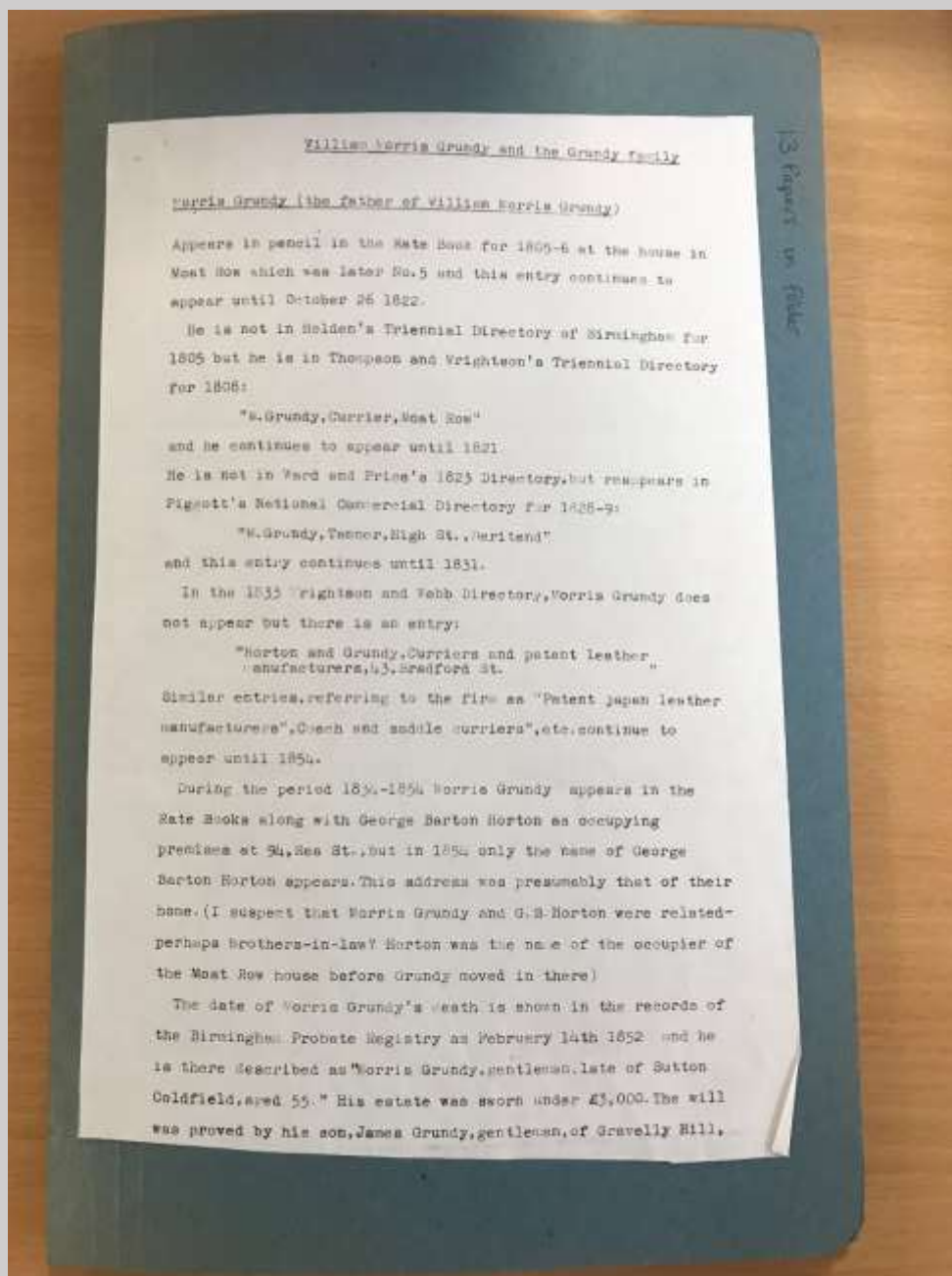


# **COLLECTION OF 'GRUNDY'** **PAPERS**

## **LIST OF FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS**

1. Two pages of notes on William Morris Grundy and the Grundy family (*William Grundy Folder, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, Local Studies*)
2. Further Note on William Morris Grundy, compiled at the Reference Library, Birmingham, 1, issued by the City Librarian. (*William Grundy Folder, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, Local Studies*)
3. Another Note on William Morris Grundy (*William Grundy Folder, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, Local Studies*)
4. Note re William Morris Grundy with additional notations (*Sutton Coldfield Reference Library Ref QSH78.1 GRU*)
5. Copy Death Certificate of William Morris Grundy
6. Several pages from 'blue' copy of *Sunshine in the Country, a Book of rural Poetry, Embellished with Photographs from Nature*, Pub. Richard Griffin and Company, London, 1861. (*Sutton Coldfield Reference Library Archives Old Reference LC821.9*) showing Photographic extracts depicting areas in Sutton Park
7. Newspaper cutting from *Midweek Observer*, Wednesday May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001
8. Grundy's Stereographic photographs of Coleshill Street, 1858 with note from Norman Granville Evans (*Normal Granville Evans' Collection in Sutton Coldfield Library*)

1. Two pages of notes on William Morris Grundy and the Grundy family (William Grundy Folder, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, Local Studies)



and another executor, on April 13th 1859 but there had been a previous grant in June 1852. Was this second grant made because William Morris Grundy (if he was the unnamed "other executor") had become unfit to act since the original grant, perhaps due to illness or insanity? According to officers of the Probate Registry this was a not uncommon cause of a second grant being made.

Morris Grundy appears from 1838 until his death on the Burgess Roll for 94, Rea St. (House, warehouse and shops).

Morris Grundy was Headborough of Birmingham in 1813 (see 53:706 fd.47 for a proclamation signed by him in that capacity.)

2. Further Note on William Morris Grundy, compiled at the Reference Library, Birmingham, 1, issued by the City Librarian. (William Grundy Folder, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, Local Studies)

GRUNDY, WILLIAM MORRIS

Born at, what is now, No 5, Moat Row, Birmingham,  
30th October, 1806.

Died in Sutton Coldfield, 20th August, 1859

His father had a leather business in Bradford Street and May Street, which, when he died in 1832 was worth almost £3000. At his death William Morris Grundy's estate was worth almost £25,000. He had a brother James and two sisters, Sarah and Ellen, and when he died he left all his possessions except his horse and carriage which went to his mother, to his two sisters. Miss Sarah Grundy was living in High Street, Sutton Coldfield, in 1873 but moved to Lichfield Road about 1876. She was still there in 1884 but by 1888 there is no entry in the directories. As to the leather business, this was carried on at one time after the father's death under the name "Grundy and Horton", and it has been supposed, but with no conclusive proof, that the Horton part of the business was related to Grundy's sister-in-law's family.



### 3. Another Note on William Morris Grundy (William Grundy Folder, Sutton Coldfield Reference Library, Local Studies)

#### WILLIAM MORRIS GRUNDY

William Morris Grundy was born on August 5th 1806, the son of Morris and Mary Grundy and baptised on October 31st 1806 at St. Martin's Church. He was almost certainly born in Most Row in the house which was later known as number 5. His father was a currier or tanner who, from about 1833, was in business as a member of the firm of Horton and Grundy, curriers and patent leather manufacturers, of 43 and 44, Bradford Street and from 1834 seems to have lived at 94, Rea Street. He died on February 14th 1852 aged 55, leaving estate which was sworn under £1,000.

W.M. Grundy also joined the family business and by 1850 was living at Sutton Coldfield in what was later the Swan Hotel (on the site of the present Royal Hotel). He evidently prospered, and died on August 20th 1859 leaving estate which was sworn under £25,000. He seems never to have married.

Little is known of his personal character, but he numbered among his friends the celebrated Scottish architect, Jonathan Anderson Ball, the pupil and friend of Rickman, and this may be taken as evidence of artistic sensibility in Grundy.

It is not known when he took up photography but he had a van built and fitted up as a dark room and this was drawn by an old brown horse. The daughter of Tom Bromwich, the driver, was still alive in the summer of 1955 although she could recall nothing of Grundy beyond his name.

He exhibited at the exhibitions of the London and Birmingham Photographic Societies in 1857 and 1858 and also at the Crystal Palace Exhibition in September 1858. A number of stereoscopic pictures, published in the late fifties in a series called "Rural England" are in the Gernsheim Collection and in 1861 a book, called "Sunshine in the country", was published which was illustrated with photographs "by the late Mr. Grundy of Sutton Coldfield". Some of these photographs are recognisable as views of Sutton Park.

His work was of a high standard and won great praise from the critics. He was noted for his compositions, consisting of a portrait of a model in Dutch or Turkish costume with appropriate properties and a "Dutch Fisherman" he exhibited in 1858 was described as "the greatest height to which we may legitimately expect photographic composition to go". He was repeatedly compared to Teniers and Wilkie and the realistic detail of his pictures was much admired. The Dutch note was a constant one and pictures in this genre were consistently preferred to the Turkish ones. Two of them were referred to as chef d'oeuvres and no less a photographer than Roger Fenton wrote "There is one picture of a fisherman - a single figure, in which the lines have all been studied as well as the pose of the figure and the chiaro oscuro : this is everything but colour".

For criticisms see "Photographic Notes" II 441 b; "Birmingham Journal" 19/XI/1857 7d; "Liverpool and Manchester Photographic Journal" II 62; *ibid.* 97; "Journal of the Photographic Society" IV 207 b, 208 b; "Photographic News" I. 52. V. 26 b.

[Compiled at the Reference Library, Birmingham 1, and issued by the City Librarian].

4. Note re William Morris Grundy with additional notations (Sutton Coldfield Reference Library Reference QSH78.1GRU)

*BRL 75 29 27* *Biographical Details QSH 78.1GRU*  
*about Gernsheim Collection in (Arts Dept?)*

WILLIAM MORRIS GRUNDY *— any picture?*

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*LBF 61.52 (A+H Floor)*

*D? Royal Photographic Society? since Lib*  
 [Compiled at the Reference Library, Birmingham 1, and issued by the City Librarian].

*See also BRL 660464 (in Archives at K3) for family details & search for information by previous librarian (F.J. PATEICK.)*  
*APF*  
*around 1955*


# 5. Copy Death Certificate of William Morris Grundy

**CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF DEATH**



GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number 1632348-1



T.M.F.

REGISTRATION DISTRICT

ASTON

in the County of Warwick

1859 DEATH in the Sub-district of Sutton Coldfield

See note overleaf

CAUTION: THERE ARE OFFENCES RELATING TO FALSIFYING OR ALTERING A CERTIFICATE AND USING OR POSSESSING A FALSE CERTIFICATE ©CROWN COPYRIGHT

WARNING: A CERTIFICATE IS NOT EVIDENCE OF IDENTITY.

Columns	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
No.	When and where died	Name and surname	Sex	Age	Occupation	Cause of death	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
22	22 August 1859	William Morris Grundy	Male	53	Currer	TB	James Grundy Present at the death	21st	George Bennett
23	Sutton Coldfield				Master	Certified	William Morris Grundy	1859	Registrar

CERTIFIED to be a true copy of an entry in the certified copy of a Register of Deaths in the District above mentioned.

Given at the GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE, under the Seal of the said Office, the

21st

day of

September

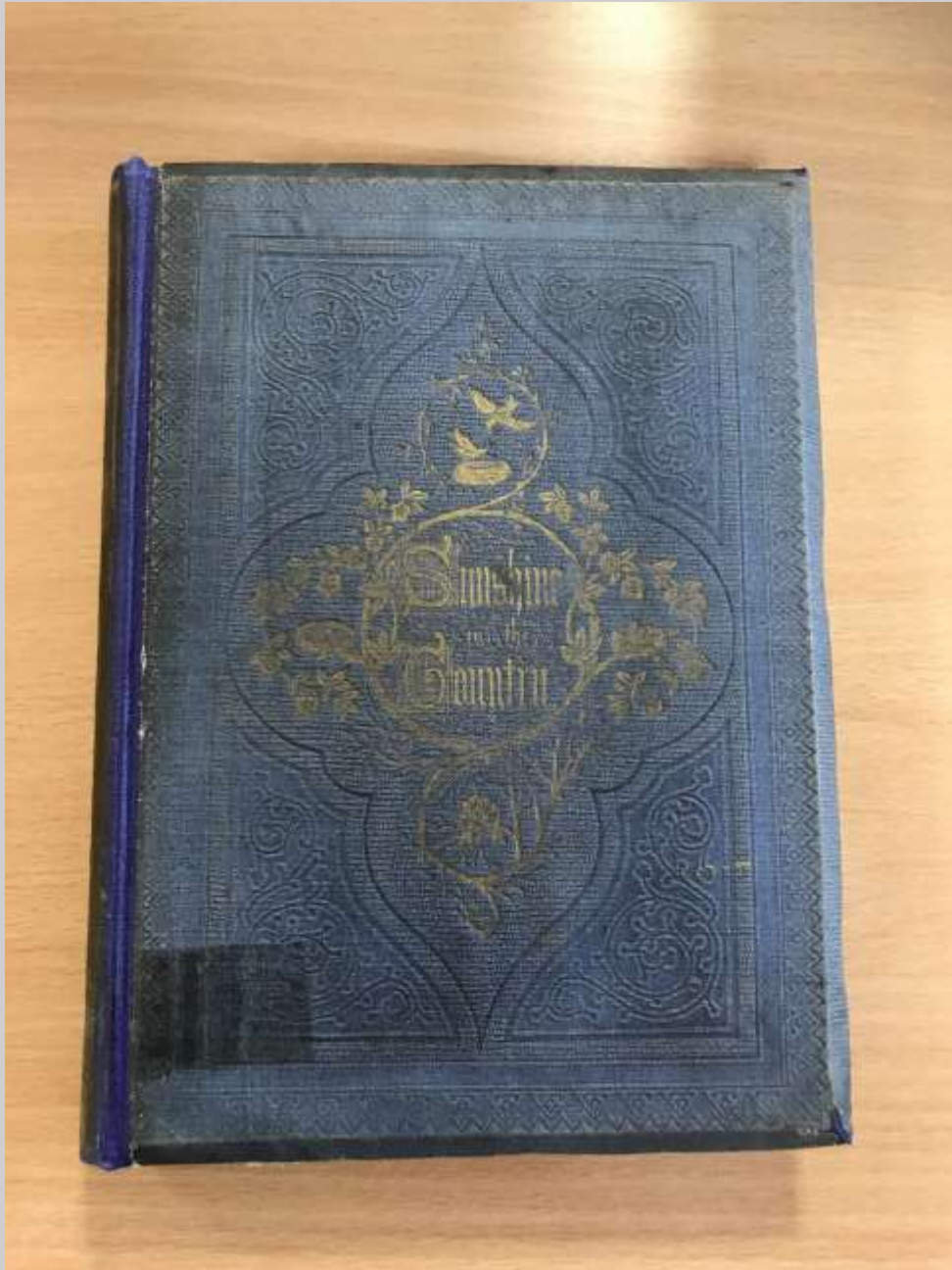
2009

**DYC 456553**

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6. Several pages from 'blue' copy of *Sunshine in the Country, a Book of rural Poetry, Embellished with Photographs from Nature*, Pub. Richard Griffin and Company, London, 1861. (Sutton Coldfield Reference Library Archives Old Reference LC821.9) showing Photographic extracts depicting areas in Sutton Park



SUNSHINE  
IN THE COUNTRY.

*A BOOK OF RURAL POETRY*

EMBELLISHED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS  
FROM NATURE



LONDON:  
RICHARD GRIFFIN AND COMPANY,  
19, STATIONERS' HALL COURT.  
1861.



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THE FARM
WOODLAND
EVENING
NOONTIME
THE FARM
A JUNE I
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MAY . . .
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A WOOD
SEPTEMI
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THE H
SUMME
JULY
SONNET



*Near Down Hall*

#### RURAL PLEASURES



'TIS not that rural sports alone invite,  
 Not all the grateful country breathes delight;  
 Here blooming health exerts her gentle reign,  
 And strings the sinews of the industrious again.  
 Soon as the morning lark salutes the day,  
 Through dewy fields I take my frequent way,  
 Where I behold the farmer's early care  
 In the revolving labours of the year.  
 When the fresh spring in all her state is crown'd,  
 And high luxuriant grass o'erspreads the ground,  
 The labourer with the bending scythe is seen,  
 Shaving the surface of the waving green;  
 Of all her native pride disrobes the land,  
 And meads lays waste before his sweeping hand;



*Money Farm*

### THE BEE.

**H**ARK! the bee winds her small but mellow horn,  
 Blithe to salute the sunny smile of morn,  
 O'er thymy downs she bends her busy course,  
 And many a stream allures her to its source.  
 'Tis noon, 'tis night. That eye so finely wrought,  
 Beyond the reach of sense, the soar of thought,  
 Now vainly asks the scenes she left behind,  
 Its orb so full, its vision so confined!  
 Who guides the patient pilgrim to her cell?  
 Who bids her soul with conscious triumph swell?  
 With conscious truth retrace the mazy clue  
 Of varied scents, that charm'd her as she flew?  
 Hail, memory, hail! thy universal reign  
 Guards the least link of being's glorious chain.

SAMUEL ROGERS

A LANDSCAPE.

**S**WEET was the scene! apart the cedars stood,  
A sunny islet open'd in the wood;  
With vernal tints the wild-heier thicket glows,  
For here the desert flourish'd as the rose;  
From sapling trees with lucid foliage crown'd,  
Gay lights and shadows twinkled on the ground:



*Forster's Pool*

Up the tall stems luxuriant creepers run  
To hang their silver blossoms in the sun;  
Deep velvet verdure clad the turf beneath,  
Where trodden flowers their richest odours breathe:





*Will Hunt Hall*

#### THE ANGLER'S SONG.

**F**ROM the river's plashy bank,  
Where the sedge grows green and rank,  
And the twisted woodbine springs,  
Upward speeds the morning lark  
To its silver cloud—and hark!  
On his way the woodman sings.

On the dim and misty lakes  
Gloriously the morning breaks,  
And the eagle's on his cloud :—  
Whilst the wind, with sighing, wooos  
To its arms the chaste cold ooze,  
And the rustling reeds pipe loud.

46

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*Keppin Hall*

#### THE FOWLER.



WITH slaughtering guns the unwearied fowler roves,  
 When frosts have whitened all the naked groves,  
 Where doves in flocks the leafless trees o'ershade,  
 And lonely woodcocks haunt the watery glade.  
 He lifts the tube, and levels with his eye:  
 Straight a short thunder breaks the frozen sky:  
 Oft, as in airy rings they skim the heath,  
 The clamorous lapwings feel the leaden death:  
 Oh, as the mounting larks their notes prepare,  
 They fall, and leave their little lives in air.

Poet.

SUNSHINE IN THE COUNTRY.

And while the vale the humid wealth imbibes  
The fostering wave sustains the finny tribes;  
The carp, with golden scales, in wanton play;  
The trout in crimson-speckled glory gay;  
The red-finned roach, the silver-coated eel;  
The pike, whose haunt the twisted roots conceal;



*Wm. H. M. M. M.*

The healing tench, the gudgeon, perch, and bream  
And all the sportive natives of the stream.  
The vigorous stream now drives the busy mill,  
And now disdains the little name of rill:  
The clustering cots adorn its flowery sides,  
Where blest content, with rosy health, abides;



*Parker's Pool*

#### WOODS IN WINTER.



HEN winter winds are piercing chill,  
And through the hawthorn blows the gale,  
With solemn feet I tread the hill  
That overbrows the lonely vale.

O'er the bare upland, and away  
Through the long reach of desert woods,  
The embracing sunbeams chastely play,  
And gladden those deep solitudes.

Where, twisted round the barren oak,  
The summer vine in beauty clung,  
And summer winds the silence broke,  
The crystal icicle is hung.



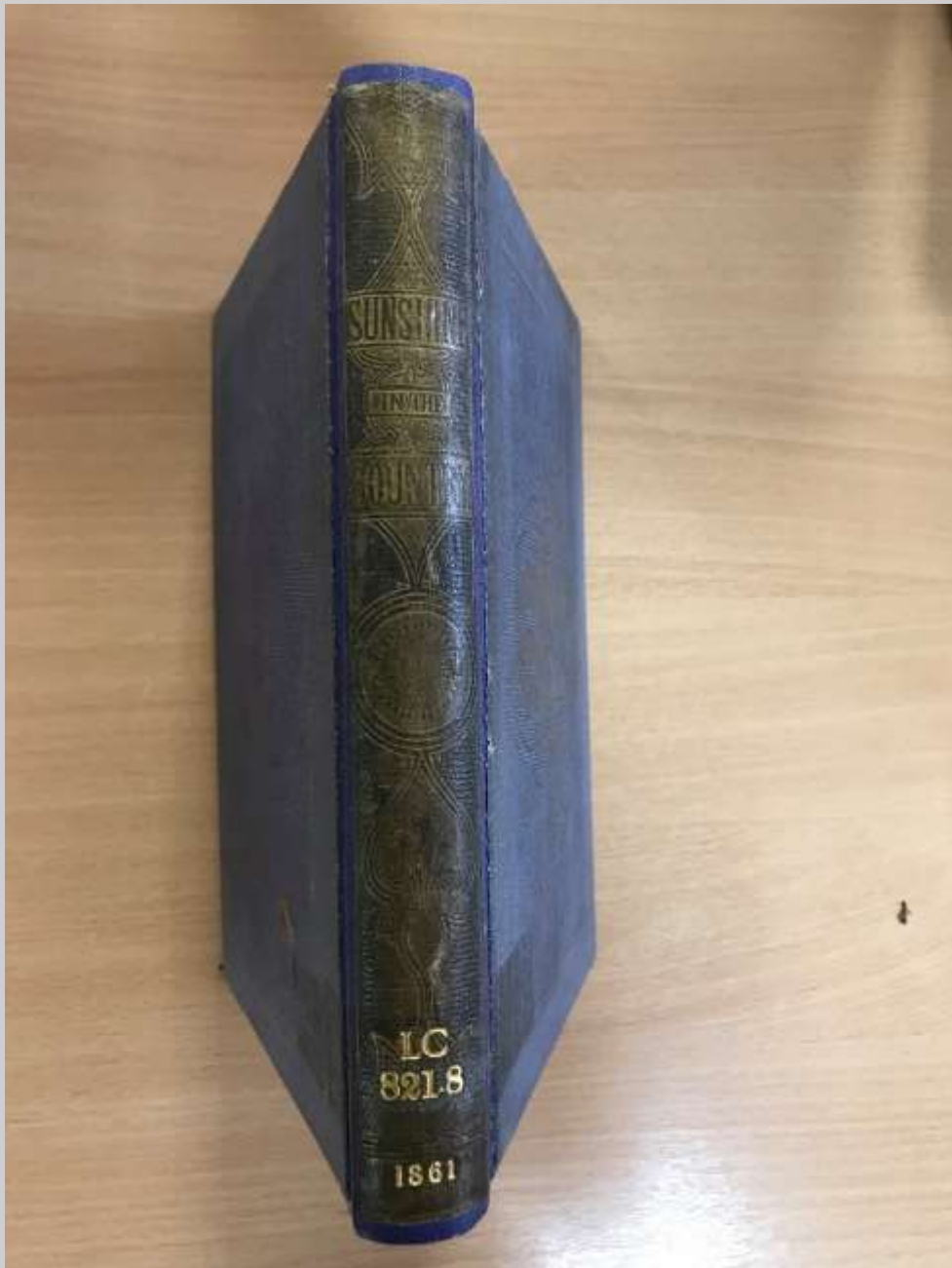
*near Bracebridge*

#### A FOREST.

**T**HE groves of Eden, vanish'd now so long,  
 Live in description, and look green in song;  
 These, were my breast inspired with equal flame,  
 Like them in beauty, should be like in fame.  
 Here hills and vales, the woodland and the plain,  
 Here earth and water seem to strive again;  
 Not chaos-like together, crush'd and bruised,  
 But, as the world, harmoniously confused;  
 Where order in variety we see,  
 And where, though all things differ, all agree.  
 Here waving groves a chequer'd scene display,  
 And part admit, and part exclude the day;

\* \* \* \* \*





7. Newspaper cutting from *Midweek Observer*, Wednesday May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2001

MIDWEEK OBSERVER, Wed. May 10, 2001.

## MIDWEEK LOOKING BACK

# The life and times of the Royal Hotel

This week the *Observer* begins a look back at the pubs in Sutton. In the first of the series reporter Charlotte Evans takes a look at the history of the Royal Hotel on the High Street.

**T**he building now known as the Royal Hotel was built in the 1750s as a private residence.

Little is known of its first occupants or owners during its first century until William Morris Grundy, a famous photographer, lived there.

Grundy was employed in the family business of currying and tanning, but his great love was photography.

### Estate

After his death in 1859 he left an estate worth more than £25,000, which mostly went to his sister.

During his life, Grundy was ridiculed for his artistic leanings but some of his illustrations now appear in the book – *Sunshine in the Country* – and many of the photographs are still recognisable as views of Sutton Park.

During his time at the house locals were often amused when Grundy's specially equipped dark room – a horse drawn van – made its way round the street.

On his death the town's records show that his sister came to live at the High Street house, but after 1888 her name is not recorded in the town's directories.

From when it was built, the house remained a private residence for a century, then became the Swan Hotel.

Guides of 1880 and 1890, though making no mention of the Swan,



The Old Swan Hotel, later the Royal, 1880. The Swan Inn is the present Royal Hotel. The building dates back to c. 1750. It was a private residence until the mid 1850's when it became the Swan Hotel. In 1910 it changed its name to the Royal Hotel to avoid confusion with the Top Swan on the Lichfield Road. (picture courtesy of Sutton Coldfield Library.)

describe The Royal, then the council house, as a magnificent building in the Italian-style.

Some £30,000 was spent on decorating and furnishing the great mansion. Though, why so much was spent on a building with so little hotel-life before it is unknown.

It is thought that the Swan became the Royal in 1910 to avoid confusion with the Top Swan on the Lichfield Road.

In about 1933 the hotel was bought by a Mr Boswell, an estate agent, whose family ran the

pub for many years.

Apparently, Mr Boswell was engaged by the previous owners of the hotel to sell it and, so the story goes, the amount at which he valued it was not reached at the auction.

He told his employers that he still thought it was worth the amount he had stated and so bought it himself.

Today, though the building is structurally 17th century, the interior has undergone extensive alterations to modernise it.

8. Grundy's Stereographic photographs of Coleshill Street, 1858 with note from Norman Granville Evans (*Normal Granville Evans' Collection in Sutton Coldfield Library*)

