

---

# *Lillington Local History Society*

---



Our third on-line “meeting” September 2020



*Image Richard Taulbut*

A big thank you to all our members for their help in raising the Society’s share of the cost of the five Welcome signs, to the Town Council and Councillors for their practical and financial support, and especially to Richard Taulbut who patiently steered the project through the many stages of its implementation.

Lillington Local History Society Website



## **'NEDDIE HAWKES'**

At a Leamington History Group History Open Day in the Parish Church a few years ago, Steve Hawkes approached me about his great grandad, Edward Hawkes.



He was born in 1869 (referred to as 'Neddie' – presumably because his father was also called Edward) marrying in 1894, Hannah Maria Hunt born on 28<sup>th</sup> July 1869.

They lived in Lillington for many years, when 'Neddie' worked on farms in and around the area including Bericote Farm. Steve's grandad, Thomas Henry Hawkes, was also a farm labourer living and working all his life in the Cubbington, Lillington and Weston-under-Wetherley area.



Steve had seen, in one of our newsletters, an article referring to the displacement of residents of property due for demolition, specifically in Cubbington Road, and particularly 140. This was the family home for a number of years until demolition in December 1956 when they settled in Thursfield Road, Lillington. My earliest Kelly's Directory of 1939 places an Edward Hawkes at that address. 'Neddie' and Hannah died before the year of Steve's birth in 1954. I am indebted to Steve, who has agreed to the Society publishing some family photographs with this short article.

Peter Coulls

## VICARAGE ROAD – NUMBERS 15 AND 17



Numbers 15 and 17 were the first houses to be built in Vicarage Road. The builder was Thomas Pratt, whose strategy was to build two houses, sell or rent them, and then use the capital to fund the next phase of the build.

*Postcard dated 1913. Margaret Rushton Collection*

In 1911, the census shows that Julia Hirons lived at **Number 15**. She was a widow and lived there with her servant, Annie Clarke. The census record shows that Mrs Hirons had lived in Newbold Terrace before moving to Vicarage Road, and that she had had two daughters, Dorothy and Winifred.

In 1911, Aubrey and Louise Seaman lived at **Number 17**. Aubrey was a timber merchant. They had a servant, Annie Cox. They had lived in North End, Coventry before moving to Lillington. Aubrey had been born in Worcester. Aubrey died in 1934, leaving his wife £104 8s 6d.

In 1934, Miss Bushill, a teacher in the Junior Department at Leamington High School, set up her own school, the *Lillington Growing Corner*, at 17 Vicarage Road, where she lived with her mother. Miss Bushill opened her school with a handful of pupils of all ages. She went on to develop it as a Nursery School and Pre-Prep, based in two large ground floor rooms looking out on to the garden, where she and her assistants spent a lot of time encouraging the pupils in all kinds of activities. She installed 1930s state of the art equipment, and held Sports Days, attended by all the mothers.



For many years after the Nursery closed, the dark wooden sun shelter remained in the garden, as did the two large hooks set into a doorway, to hold a swing. A row of coat hooks still lines a wall of the hall, but the big Victorian rocking horse is long gone. Miss Bushill ran the school for over four decades and is remembered by a former pupil, now a teacher himself, as teaching from a wheelchair in her later years, but always immensely patient and kind.  
MR and CR

*School images: Mrs J Downes & the Nursery archive ,Leamington Courier online archive*

## **LEWIS & WATTERS– ‘Builders of Better Homes’**

Many of you will be familiar with the name Lewis & Watters - the company founded in 1928 by W H Lewis, that built many of the houses in Lillington before and after World War 11

William Herbert (Bill) Lewis was born in Penkridge in Staffordshire on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1905, the son of Herbert Edward Lewis, a Colliery Weighman, and Annie Elizabeth Hinton. Bill had two younger siblings, Marjorie and Arthur, who were born in 1908 and 1910 respectively. In spite of his father’s wish that Bill should work in a solicitor’s office, Bill’s ambition was to become a carpenter and he journeyed around the country working in various locations before settling in Leamington Spa. In January 1932 he married Dorothy Law, a Penkridge girl, and they settled in Leamington, living at 186 Cubbington Road – a house built by Messrs Lewis & Watters. They had two daughters – Freda was born in April 1934 and Sylvia in July 1935.

Lewis & Watters had a recognised apprenticeship programme for the training of their staff and, in 1947, Bill Lewis was appointed Apprentice Master under the Ministry of Works training scheme as well as becoming a Governor at what was then Mid-Warwickshire College of Further Education where much of the practical training would have taken place.

Bill Lewis retired from the business in March 1965 and devoted much of his time to his passion for bowls. He had been a founder member of the Lillington Bowling Club in 1930; he was also active at the bowling clubs in Leamington, Stratford-Upon-Avon and Kineton, where he lived after leaving Leamington at Windmill Farm on Pittern Hill. He was well-respected in bowling circles, becoming county president in 1962-63 and vice-president and president of the English Bowling Association. He died at Kineton on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1990.

John (Jack) Watters was born in Coleraine, Northern Ireland on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1898, the son of Joseph Watters and Mary Ann McLaughlin. He was the second of six children born to Joseph and Mary Ann and had three brothers and two sisters. We know little of Jack’s life before he arrived in Leamington Spa other than that he was also a carpenter and joined forces with Bill Lewis the year after the business was founded. Jack and his family lived at 143 Cubbington Road – a detached house on the corner of Lonsdale Road.

In 1924 Jack married Margaret Grimshaw, from Larne in Northern Ireland, and they had a son, Sean Patrick Phair, who was born on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1928 - Phair was Margaret’s mother’s surname. Sadly, Margaret died on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1934 at the age of 37. In October 1938, Jack married, for the second time, Jessie Knowles from Birmingham. Unfortunately, Jessie died just over 6 years later on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1944 at the age of 41. It is not known if Jack and Jessie had any children. Jack died on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1959 and is buried in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalene in Lillington with his son, Sean, who died on 7<sup>th</sup> September 2006. Margaret and Jessie are also buried, in separate graves, in Lillington churchyard.

---

From small beginnings in 1928, the business of Messrs Lewis & Watters soon earned itself a good reputation and became well known in the local area as ‘Builders of Better Homes’.

An advertisement in the *Royal Leamington Spa Courier and Warwickshire Standard*, dated 29<sup>th</sup> March 1935, invited potential house buyers to ‘inspect at your very door, an “Ideal Home” calculated to appeal to the most discriminating owner’ - see next page.

In a later advertorial in the *Royal Leamington Spa Courier and Warwickshire Standard*, dated 17<sup>th</sup> January 1936, Lewis & Watters were described as ‘... creators of true homes, which structurally embody all the refinements and improvements of luxury residential architecture.’. The article also mentioned that ‘Some of the conveniences would astonish and please the most exacting buyer; spacious, bright, airy bedrooms; cheerful dining rooms and restful sitting rooms; special fitments and cupboards; apart from large gardens.’



For many years Messrs Lewis & Watters was based in the outbuildings of Manor Farm in Lime Avenue, alongside Ted Blackwell’s ‘Lime Garages’ business, and was responsible for building many of the traditional semi-detached houses in the area before the outbreak of war in 1939.

In the years leading up to WWII, the company also took on work allocated by the Air Ministry and Ministry of Works and was involved in airfield and military building, as well as diversifying into the building of hospitals, churches, factories, offices and public houses. Government work continued to make up a large part of the company’s work, both locally and nationally, such that in 1943 a branch office was opened in Stafford.

After the war, by which time the company had become Lewis & Watters Ltd, the business was involved in the building of schools, factories, houses and flats to replace those lost during the war. The company’s reputation was spreading far and wide and, in 1958, an office was opened in Oxford to service projects in that area for, initially, the Air Ministry, but then for local authorities.

The Eden Court flats at the top of Mason Avenue were built in 1960, the recently demolished ‘Bailey’s, the Furniture People’ shop on Warwick Street in 1963, and the ‘revolutionary’ hexagonal Formula Houses on Cubbington Road which were deemed to be the ‘Shape of Things to Come’ when the prototype was advertised in *The Birmingham Post* in February 1964. Designed ‘with the modern family in mind’, the houses boasted ‘such outstanding features as central heating, a fully fitted kitchen, large picture windows to catch the maximum sunlight and wood block floors’.

In 1961, following the death of Jack Watters a couple of years before, the company, which was now a subsidiary of the Annol Development Co Ltd, appointed two new directors - C P Nolan became the Chairman and Dennis Howell MP a Director, with Bill Lewis as Managing Director. In 1963, the company moved its headquarters from Manor Farm in Lillington to Warwick, taking over the premises of the Donald Healey Motor Company at Welland Mill, Lock Lane, off Millers Road. The farm buildings were taken over by Lime Garages and converted into a car showroom for their Saab dealership.

After Bill Lewis retired from the business in March 1965, Mr Nolan became Managing Director and Chairman of the company. Later that year, in October, rumours started circulating that the company was in financial difficulties, but these were strenuously denied by the Company and in December 1965, Mr Nolan invested a further £20,000 in the business to meet expansion needs as “The future prospects for the company are very promising.” By January 1966, however, it was announced that the company was being investigated by the Official Receiver and the power of the directors had ceased. The company went into administration shortly afterwards.

Sources: *Ancestry, British Newspaper Archive Website* DENISE WATSON

## HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF

I have a family story whose accuracy I could not completely verify, but I think it is true. It has a tenuous link to the present coronavirus emergency. One of my Grandmothers had fifteen siblings. In the long dead days of the early twentieth century two of the brothers, Alfred and Arthur, decided to visit Canada to make their fortunes. Arthur was recorded as being a footman in 1911.

Having tried their hands at various measures they met with little success and decided they should come back to England. However, they had only sufficient money at that time for just one of them to return.

Arthur remained in Canada settling there and joining the Mounties - the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He became a sergeant in due course, and was put in charge of the Mounties' Museum in Regina. He had two sons, both of whom also joined the force, as did one of his grandsons. Arthur visited England in the late 1950s and unfortunately I did not get the opportunity to meet him, but it was said that he consumed a bottle of whisky every day.

Alfred returned via Quebec on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1912, apparently not entirely penniless since he sailed on the ship "Empress of Britain", owned by the Canadian Pacific railway company, though he probably travelled steerage. He was a carpenter and took over his ageing father's carpentry and undertaking business in Worcester, which apparently was not doing well owing to the lack of business acumen. His venture shortly coincided with the Spanish 'Flu Epidemic of 1919 which caused the undertaking aspect of the business to prosper and flourish and made him a rich man. His became the leading funeral business in the city and it remains so now - unless anything has changed in the past handful of years. He has long since died and his only son was killed in the Second World War.

(As can so often happen in undertaking research, learning about the "Empress of Britain" initiated tangential research which has indicated that this was the first of the ships of that name; she was built in Glasgow and launched on 11th November 1905. She had two funnels, two masts, and two propellers, with an average speed of 18 knots; the passenger compliment was 310 first class, 470 second class and 730 steerage. The maiden voyage was to Quebec and thereafter she sailed back and forth on the trans-Atlantic route. She was in quarantine several times when a communicative disease was discovered. About two weeks after the great Titanic disaster, the Empress hit an iceberg, but damage was only slight. After wartime adventures, the ship was re-named SS Montroyal and after further service she was scrapped in 1930.)

After a hundred years pandemic history is repeating itself but I cannot recall anyone mentioning whether any precautions were taken in 1919 or whether there was any fear of contracting the dreaded 'Flu at that time.

GRAHAM E. COOPER

*(With thanks to Chris Rhodes for some useful research)*

This Newsletter is published by the Lillington Local History Society, c/o Lillington Free Church, Cubbington Road, Leamington Spa, CV32 7AL The views expressed in the Newsletter are personal to the contributors and are not necessarily the views of the Society.