

Notes on Alan Derek Riddell's visit on 4th October 2013 to Ruth Jeavons at 44 Necton Road, with information on the High Street property now known as Fuchsia Pink. (2024: The Reading Rooms)

Alan maintains his connection with the village, caring for family graves in the churchyard. He was on his way back from Clacton to Peterborough where he lives when he paid a surprise but welcome visit. We had a conversation about his grandfather, Henry William Riddell, known as "Harry", who established the saddlery business at that premises in the high street in the thirties. Alan's parents were Algernon Riddell and Hilda Maud Bracey. Grandparents on his mother's side were Albert and Kate Bracey who lived at Wayside Cottage with their children Gladys, Hilda and Doris. Albert Bracey was in the Metropolitan Police.

Alan's relatives in the churchyard are his grandparents, Harry and Annie Riddell. Annie was a Field before marriage. The family originally came from Northumberland, but Harry was born in Didlington, Norfolk. He and his wife had two daughters, Connie and Edna, and four sons, Algernon (Allan's dad), Cecil, Leslie and Victor.

It seems Harry arrived at Wheathampstead railway station aged 20 with no more than a suitcase and stayed. He soon met Charlie Collins and they became the best of friends. He married Annie Field, and Alan remembers visiting their daughter Connie who ended her days at the Salvation Army home in Sandridge. She told him that Harry had served in the army in Palestine during the World War I and came back with malaria.

Apparently Harry learnt his trade at Exning, near Newmarket. Eventually he left the business at the saddlery in the High Street and went to work behind the Swan. Finally, his death certificate tells us that he lived in the Marford Road and ended his days as a postman. He is buried in the churchyard behind the shop in an unmarked grave.

A Mr Archer, who used to live near the Red Cow at the top of the Hill but is now no longer with us, once told Alan how very fit and athletic his grandfather Harry Riddell had been in his youth. He could overtake everyone in a race, even after giving them a head start. He could clear a five-bar gate – like hurdles in a race – at a single jump. This same Mr Archer had been a witness at Harry's marriage in Southgate.

[Southgate was where the Baxendales had their Carter Paterson removal business in the 1920s I believe. Joseph Baxendale moved from Southgate to Gustard Wood, where he built a big house at Baxendales, so it's likely that Harry had a connection with that business. Kippings (now Nonno's at Collins Corner) uses the conservatory from Baxendales as the restaurant seating area. It was bought by Charlie Collins when the house was demolished post World War I (see 'Delightful and Bracing', by Peter Hale a history of Blackmore End and Porters End and the Baxendales on the Sources page of this website). The name Baxendale endures in Wheathampstead as the name of an allotment field RJ]

Carter Paterson's horse-drawn carriages would always stop outside Riddell's shop for their leather work, cutting quite a dash in the high street, no doubt. The craftsmen there made

gloves as well as horse collars, reins, harnesses and all equine and other accoutrements. Villagers remember the spectacle of a procession every summer of Carter Paterson vans driving through the village on their way to Baxendales for a day out at the boss's home.

Young Harry Riddell had a bad habit. He liked to drink. After work he would spend the money he'd made at work at the Bell public house over the road. Business profits soon disappeared and Harry was written off by his family who wanted to have nothing to do with him. One incident showing the extent of the family disapproval of Harry's drinking tells how a cousin was told not to talk to him if she met him in the street. "My cousin, when she was ten years old walked up Brewhouse Hill and remembered seeing an old man. 'You don't talk to him. That's your grandfather', she was told."

"He drank the money away", said Alan. As a result, it was said that 'The son threw the father out'. Ironically, however, the father outlived one of his sons. Algernon died young, aged 40, of a brain tumour in 1956. His brother Cecil arranged the funeral. Grandfather Harry watched from a distance peeping from behind another tombstone. No one spoke to him. Harry himself died three months afterwards. He was buried behind the shop in 1956 with Annie his wife.

Alan said of Wheathampstead, "My roots are there and always will be. I do love Wheathampstead."

