

EWELME FORGE

and the Godden Family

In 1875 Edward Godden and his family came to live in Ewelme.

Edward was a blacksmith and he began practising his skills at the Forge or Smithy on The Street. The forge and its accompanying house where he lived were almost certainly there already. The census five years previously had shown five blacksmiths in the village.

Edward had been born in 1845 in the hamlet of Fair Oak, near Stratfield Saye, a small village in the north east corner of Hampshire about 9 miles south of Reading. His parents were William and Jane Godden and he was the middle child of 5 sons. His father was a labourer and carpenter.

Edward became an apprentice blacksmith, a training which normally lasted four years. He then became a 'journeyman' blacksmith. This often entailed travelling from place to place learning from different smiths as a helper in their shops. By 1871 Edward was living in the village of Whitchurch in Oxfordshire, lodging with the Gutteridge family. He may have 'qualified' later in the year as he gives his profession as 'Blacksmith' on the 28th October 1871 when he married local girl Rebecca Goodall. Rebecca was the daughter of Samuel Goodall of Whitchurch a gardener.

Edward and Rebecca remained in Whitchurch for a few years where their first two sons John and Frank were born. The family then moved to Ewelme where their third and fourth sons George Richard and Samuel Edward were born.



Above: Edward and Rebecca Godden beside their forge.

Edward's work involved not only shoeing horses but also mending and producing agricultural equipment. Apparently Edward would get up as early as 4.0 am to go to Downs Farm to shoe farm horses before they were needed for the day's work; he was also contracted to keep farm ploughs in good order for £1 a year.

Until Edward's sons were old enough to join the family enterprise Edward employed a fellow blacksmith. In 1891 this might have been William Lancely, as he was a blacksmith living next door to the forge.

Edward and Rebecca's eldest son John followed his father in the blacksmith trade and became an expert farrier. John sought adventure and used his marketable trade as a farrier to join the Queens own seventh Hussars. He served in South Africa fighting in the Matabele Expedition and the 2nd Boer War. He settled in South Africa for a while serving with the police. In 1906 he married Gertrude Mary Rogers and the following year they had a daughter, Gertrude, who was born in Johannesburg. John and his family returned to Ewelme by 1911 and once again John took up his trade as a blacksmith working with his father.

Edward and Rebecca's second son Frank at first tried a career as a baker, serving as an assistant baker in Goring. However, the pull of smithying must have been strong as he returned to Ewelme to assist his father at the Forge. This might have been at the time his brother John joined the army. Frank married Sarah Jane Winfield in 1901 in Ewelme. They were to have four daughters before a son, Frank junior, arrived in 1912.

Edward and Rebecca's third son George Richard never married and made a career in the railways.



Above: The Godden family, taken in 1912.

Top row the four sons of Edward and Rebecca. From left to right: John, George Richard, Samuel Edward and Frank.

Middle row from left to right: Gertrude (John's wife), Edward Godden, Frances Godden (daughter of Frank), Rebecca Godden nee Goodall, Sarah Jane Godden nee Winfield holding baby Frank junior.

Lower row from left to right: Gertrude (daughter of John), Dolly, Bertha, and Olive (daughters of Frank).

The first world war broke out in 1914, and three of Edward and Rebecca's son served with the military. John, of course, already had military experience and he joined the Royal Field Artillery. He was presumably wounded but nature of his injuries is not known. Unfortunately he contracted pneumonia and died at the Military Hospital in Middlesbrough on 1st December 1918. He was 46 years old. He is the oldest serviceman listed on the memorial at Ewelme.

Frank applied for leave not to serve as he was fully occupied in Ewelme. Apart from smithing, he was a carpenter, general repairer, bricklayer and also assisted a local baker. His appeal not to be called-up was allowed. However in the last few months of the war he joined the Royal Air Force.

Samuel Edward joined up in December 1914. His mechanical abilities probably led him to join the British Red Cross Society (BRCS) as an Ambulance Driver and mechanic. He served in France gaining the Star medal, British war medal and victory medal. He was not discharged until August 1919. After the war he became first a chauffeur and then an electro-plater anodising aircraft. He married Frances Allward in 1940 and they lived in Hatfield. It is thought they had no children.

After WW1 Frank took over the Forge, living in Ewelme with his family. In 1922 he describes himself as 'Carpenter and Repairs' but gives his 'employer' as 'E. Godden, shoeing and general smith'. Edward died in 1924 and Rebecca in 1923.

The forge became a popular evening meeting place for men to gossip and keep warm, and Bertha Godden's daughter, Cynthia Winfield – who lived in Forge Cottage - remembers local family pigs could be taken there on Saturday mornings to be killed, their protesting squeals echoing down The Street.

Machinery was now replacing the work for agricultural blacksmiths and Frank eventually became a builder, a profession followed by his son Frank Jnr. The forge became a bicycle repair shop although it still housed its old tools and other useful things.



The Forge in 2020

Frank senior died in 1948 and Frank junior in 1996.

The Forge and the house then passed to Frank junior's great niece Nadine Pudwell née Anderson and her husband Terry. The Forge had by this time become derelict and in 2022 it was rebuilt. An interesting find was some unusual bricks with a heart motif. Some of these can now be seen embedded in the walls of the re-built forge. These bricks were manufactured in Australia by convicts. They were probably brought to England in the early 19th century as ballast on returning convict ships.



The anvils from the old Forge have been made into a seat. A collection of old working tools recovered from the Forge are shown below.



