

Catherine Maxwell of Saffron Close

Ewelme News, Oct-Nov 2005

Jack Wheeler has loaned us a copy of a charming letter written in 1917 by Miss Catherine Maxwell of Saffron Close [House], to his father Frederick who was serving with the British Forces in Greece. Apparently, the Maxwell's financed Fred's carpentry apprenticeship in 1912 and Jack believes that the amount paid for an apprenticeship, even at that time, was considerable. However, such a generous gesture could be explained as their home Manor Cottage (now known as Kings Pool Cottage) belonged to the Maxwell's and they employed Fred's father William to do manual work. However, William had died in 1895 at the early age of 53, leaving his widow Emily (aged 43) to bring up their five children, including young Fred, born at Manor Cottage, only two years before his father's death. The Maxwell's allowed Emily and her family to remain in the cottage for another 20 years until her death in May 1915. Thereafter the Wheeler family dispersed from Ewelme.

The tone of the letter is a gentle reflection of the benevolence often shown by the landed gentry towards their employees, and obviously appreciated, as Fred took care to preserve it through the campaign and keep it throughout his lifetime.

*From Miss Catherine Maxwell of Saffron Close
To Fredk. Wheeler
16073 D. Coy. 8th OBLI [Oxon and Bucks Light Infantry]
Pioneer
Salonica Force*

Ewelme Feb 8th 1917

I was very glad to have your nice long letter Fred and am sorry not to have thanked you for it before. It interests me to hear all about you and what you are doing and though I join in your wish that you were back again at your carpentry work and this dreadful war over with all my heart, it is a great satisfaction that you can write cheerfully and keep your spirits up in spite of everything. It is the way of all our brave soldiers and please God they will win for us an honourable and lasting peace. I am pleased by your offering to repay me some of the money I advanced to you – but I have been amply repaid by your turning out so well as a carpenter, and with good a character as a man. Mr Brasher [Brashers the Builders of Wallingford, his Master] was talking to me about you the other day and spoke most highly of you and he says when you come back you will be working for yourself and no longer as an apprentice.

So, I do not want your money Fred, and I hope you will put it somewhere in safety for the day when you are married and have a house. But instead of giving it back to me I should like you to put some of it, say £5, into the War Loan. The government wants all the money they can get just now, and it would be safer there than anywhere and give you good interest. I daresay you can find out all about it out there, but if I can be of any use to you, I will gladly do anything I can. For every 15/6d you would get £1 in five years or I believe you can put £5 in, paying it by degrees but I will try to find out. It would be patriotic to do this.

Both Miss Beatrice [Catherine's younger sister] and I were very glad to hear your health was so good. You were glad that it was getting cool when you last wrote, I am afraid it is too cool now, and you may be suffering very much from cold. I hope all the Ewelme boys are well and out of hospital,

though Malta would be nice and warm now. Is there any chance of your getting into the Flying Corps as you told me you would like to do? It seems to have a great attraction for people. I know several young men in it who all like it, I should not myself I must say!



Fred Wheeler

I am glad Edie [Fred's sister Edith in service] is so happy – I believe she is in a particularly good place and that she has an excellent mistress. We had the General here from headquarters in France for a few days lately, looking well. Major Aymer Maxwell, who has been seriously ill and had three months sick leave is now gone back to his duty. I hope I shall hear from you again someday and will try to answer more quickly. I have had influenza and not been well since the beginning of Jan. I hope very soon to send you a parcel of a few trifles.

*With every good wish I am yours faithfully,
Catherine Maxwell*

When Frederick returned from the Great War he went to live in Benson and took up his trade as a carpenter. He worked on many local projects including the building of the legendary KCB Café on the Old London Road, demolished to make way for runway extensions in the last War. Catherine Maxwell died in 1926 aged 84. Beatrice lived on in Saffron Close until 1945 and is fondly remembered to this day by the Miners and Knowles families who took refuge under her roof during the War.

Ewelme Village Archive

