South Ella Part 5
John Wilson

Introduction

Until now, all five owners of South Ella – Robert Coupland Pease, John Broadley, John Beadle, John Egginton and Arthur Egginton – were men of great wealth and influence. They were from the merchant classes and had inherited their fortune and position from earlier generations. Each had been born with a silver spoon in his mouth. The next occupant of South Ella came from the opposite end of the social spectrum. John Wilson's father was an agricultural labourer and, to make ends meet, his mother worked in the local woollen mill in West Yorkshire. Through hard work, a fortuitous apprenticeship and a good head for business, eventually, John Wilson rose to become the owner of a factory in Hull employing over a thousand people, which he ultimately sold, reportedly, for £150,000, in 1907. Described in one account as "the epitome of a hard-working Yorkshire Methodist"[1], this is the story of a self-made man.

Abraham Stansfield

Our story begins, not with John Wilson, but with his father-in-law, Abraham Stansfield. Abraham died in 1861 and it is probable that John never met the father of his future wife. However, John's eventual success as an entrepreneur in the mass production of metal canisters undoubtedly had its origins through his relationship with Abraham Stansfield's family and Abraham's occupation as a metalworker.

Abraham Stansfield was born in Idle, near Bradford, around 1819, the son of John Stansfield, a botanist by profession. When he came of age, Abraham pursued a very different career to his father becoming a metalworker, specialising in tin and brass. On 14th March 1839, he married Mary Garth, the daughter of John Garth, a plumber[2], glazier and farmer[3]. Two of John Garth's

[1] *The Telegraph & Argus*, 9th August 2010. https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/tahistory/8319851.how-john-made-his-brass-out-of-tin/ Although described as a Methodist, it is more likely that John Wilson was, if of any religious persuasion, a Baptist. However, there appears to be no evidence that he was a practising churchgoer.

[2] During the early 19th century, a plumber was a person who worked with lead.

[3] John Garth was listed as a farmer of 48 acres, employing three men, in the 1851 census. He was born on 12 Mar 1797 in Barnard Castle, Durham, England. He married Elizabeth Dawson on 3 Apr 1820 in Calverley, West Riding, Yorkshire. Elizabeth was born in 1802 in Shipley, West Riding, Yorkshire, England. He died 10 November 1872 in Idle, West Riding, Yorkshire.

sons, James and John Dawson, and a nephew, Peter, all followed him into similar professions. Thus, when Abraham and Mary's children grew up in Idle and, subsequently, in nearby Shipley, metalworking was very much part of their lives.

Abraham and Mary Stansfield had three daughters and a son, Nanny, b.1845, Sarah, b.1847, John Garth, b.1853, all born in Idle and baptised at Idle Upper Chapel Independent Church, and Mary Eliza, b. 1857 in Shipley, but baptised at the 'home' church in Idle. Sadly, John Garth, the only son of Abraham and Mary, died at the age of three, leaving the family without a male heir.

Details from the census of April 1861, show that, by that date, Abraham was pursuing his business at 2-4 Commercial Street, Shipley, where he was described as a pinner[4]. In his case, this would have been a person who made pots and pans and other metal containers. Shortly after the date of the census, he died, aged 41. This left Mary widowed with two teenage girls and one of four years old to bring up. At the same time, she was trying to maintain the business in Commercial Street where she was helped in the early years of her bereavement by her father or, possibly, her brother. Certainly, a John Garth is listed in a trade directory of 1863 as running the business in Commercial Street. However, by 1871, Mary had taken over control, probably with help from her two eldest daughters. Mary had taken in a boarder, William Collins, a wool sorter, who would have worked in one of the many local worsted mills in Shipley. By this time, Mary was described as an ironmonger, and it was around this time that she took on a young apprentice called John Wilson to help with the business.

Commercial Street, Shipley. Nos. 2-4 are the first two shops on the left-hand side. This photograph dates from about 1910, so the street might have looked somewhat different during the time these premises were occupied by Mary Stansfield.

[4] A pinner was a person who worked in a cooper's shop and, thus, someone who was involved in the process of barrel or tub manufacture. This would have included those who made metal containers as well as the more traditional wooden barrels.

John Wilson - Ironmonger's Apprentice

John Wilson was born in the West Riding of Yorkshire on 18th January 1849. He was the third child of William and Sarah Wilson who, at the time of John's baptism in 1852, were living in the parish of Bingley. By 1861, the family had moved to Baildon, near Shipley, where William was described as a farm labourer. Sarah was working in a local mill as a worsted weaver and the three oldest children, including John, were all described as 'factory operative worsted', maybe employed at the same mill as their mother.[5] In 1871, John Wilson was to be found in Leeds living with his mother's brother, Samuel Harrison, when he was described as a leather salesman.

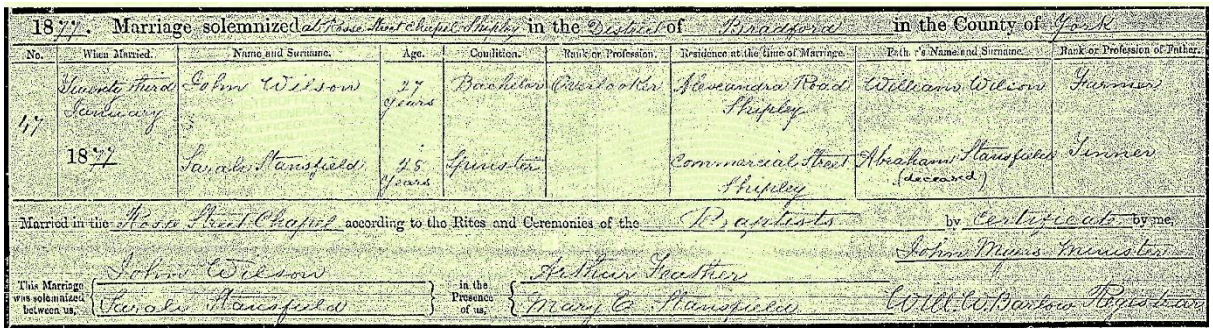
23 Alexandra Road, Shipley, the home of John Wilson, c1875-1890

The exact date when John Wilson started his apprenticeship as an ironmonger at the Commercial Street premises of Mary Stansfield is not known, although he was certainly employed there by the mid-1870s. By this time, he had taken up residence at 23 Alexandra Road, Shipley, and was proving himself a capable assistant for Mary, helping her to develop the business.

On 23rd January 1877, John married Sarah Stansfield, one of Mary's daughters, at the local Baptist chapel in Rosse Street, Shipley. By then he had become a partner in the business, which had become known as Stansfield and Wilson. After their marriage, John and Sarah lived in John's house at 23 Alexandra Road where a son, Charles Stansfield Wilson was born in 1879, followed by a daughter, Mary, in 1882. At the time of Charles's baptism on 16th July 1879, John's occupation was stated as Overlooker, which meant he was one whose job it was to supervise the work of others. From this, we can infer that Stansfield

[5] There were a number of woollen mills in Shipley at this time, the most well-known being that built by Sir Titus Salt in 1853 at Saltaire.

and Wilson were employing a number of men, although the size of their workforce is not known.



No.	When Married.	Name and Surname.	Age.	Condition.	Rank or Profession.	Residence at the time of Marriage.	Father's Name and Surname.	Rank or Profession of Father.
47	Twenty third January 18[illegible]	John Wilson	27 years	Bachelor	Chief Clerk	Alexandra Road Shipley	William Wilson	Farmer
	18[illegible]	Sarah Stansfield	25 years	Spinster		Commercial Street Shipley	Abraham Stansfield (deceased)	Farmer

Married in the Rosse Street Chapel according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Baptists by Certificate by me, John Mums Minister

This Marriage was solemnized between us: John Wilson, Sarah Stansfield

In the Presence of us: Arthur Feather, Mary E. Stansfield

Wm. C. Barton Registrar

Marriage certificate of John Wilson and Sarah Stansfield

In the late 1880s, Mary Stansfield, by then nearly 70, was approaching retirement, and she seemed more than happy to leave the expanding business in the hands of her son-in-law. By 1891, Mary was described as a retired ironmonger and was living at 21 Alexandra Road, next door to John and Sarah's house, although by this time, they had moved on and were living in Park View, Shipley.

Park Works, Shipley

After Mary Stansfield's retirement, John Wilson developed the business further by commencing manufacture of metal canisters to supply to various industries such as tea, paint and household goods. The location of his business moved from Commercial Street to larger premises in Rosse Street, Shipley. This building was located almost opposite the chapel in which he and Sarah had been married. A company called the West Yorkshire Canister Company was situated in Rosse Street in 1891 and it is possible that John Wilson was connected with this enterprise. Certainly, by 1898, 'John Wilson, Chrome Tin Printer', was operating from the premises in Rosse Street, which had become known as Park Works. An entry in a Bradford Trade Directory for that year, reads as follows:

Detail of metal container manufactured by John Wilson for Harvey's Torchlight Flake Tobacco, 1890s

> John Wilson, chrome tin printer, Park Works, Rosse Street, Shipley. TN 4 Shipley; TA "WILSON" Shipley; residence, Park View, Shipley; TN 4a Shipley

By this time, automated production of metal canisters had been installed and the latest communication methods, i.e. telephone and telegraph, were in place. John Wilson had built up a diverse clientele and was shipping his products all over the country. He was at the forefront in using new technology, and this forward-looking approach was undoubtedly behind the huge growth of his business.

An unusual tea caddy manufactured by John Wilson It is a facsimile of a shell commemorating the Transvaal War 1899-1900.

The small print on the base reads 'John Wilson, Tin Printer, Shipley, Sole Maker'

In 1901, John Wilson and his family were to be found living in a house in South Crescent, Ripon, an exclusive neighbourhood in the city. Both John and his son Charles (now 21 years old) were described as iron merchants in the census taken on 1st April in that year. Why they had moved to Ripon, albeit temporarily, remains one mystery to be solved in the fascinating history of this family. There are a number of possible explanations but this short interlude in their life needs to be explored further.

Two of John Wilson's largest clients were in Hull and they accounted for a significant proportion of his factory's output. This fact was to influence the next move in the development of John Wilson's business.

John Wilson and his family lived only a short time in Ripon before removing to Sutton-on-Hull. It was in the East Riding of Yorkshire that John and Sarah were to spend the remainder of their lives.

As mentioned above, two large users of metal canisters were located in Hull. Reckitt & Sons and Sanderson Paints were both important customers of John Wilson. In addition, there were numerous other paint manufacturers in the city, who would have represented significant potential for his business. John Wilson felt he needed to be located close to these large users of canisters in order to reduce transport costs and expedite delivery.

The Wilson Family

John Wilson's father, William, was the son of another William, who was a 'joiner of Silk Street Leeds' at the time of the younger William's baptism at Leeds Parish Church in 1826. William married Sarah Harrison in November 1843 in Otley Parish Church. At that time, William, aged 19, was described as a farmer of Hawksworth (4 miles south of Otley) and Sarah, daughter of John Harrison, lived in Bingley. Soon after their marriage they settled in the Bingley area where Mary, their first daughter, was born around 1845. Another girl, Jane was born two years later and then along came John in 1849. After John, another three girls, Sarah Ann, Elizabeth and Harriet, were born and it was not until 1860 that John finally acquired another brother, Timothy William. Arthur, born in 1866, was the eighth and final child of William and Sarah's marriage. William is listed in census returns variously as 'wool comber' and 'farm labourer'. Whilst John Wilson was pursuing his business interests in Shipley and beyond, his parents and siblings were living in Baildon Green, an address in Baildon, a mile or so to the north-east of Shipley.

FORMER LICENSEE'S DEATH.

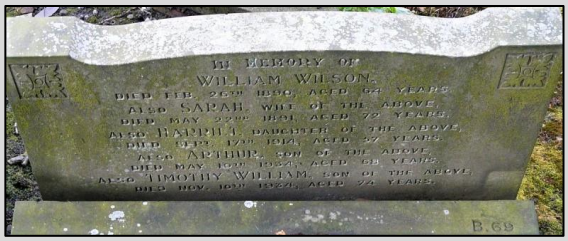
The death took place on Saturday, in his 75th year, of Mr. Timothy William Wilson, a former licensee of the old Roebuck Inn, Baildon.

Mr. Wilson, who was a bachelor, was born at Baildon Green, and had lived in the Baildon district all his life. He was mine host at the Roebuck Inn, which was closed down about seven years ago, for 26 years, and was very well known among the older generation of Baildonians. He was a popular member of the Baildon Conservative Club, and of the Airedale Beagles Hunt for many years.

The funeral took place from the residence of his niece, Mrs. S. M. Pemberton, of 55, Northgate, Baildon, on Wednesday. A service was conducted at Baildon Parish Church, followed by interment at Charlestown Cemetery, Shipley.

The flag of the Baildon Conservative Club was flown at half-mast, as a tribute to an old and valued member.

Timothy William became a beer retailer and was the licensee at the Roebuck Inn in Baildon for many years. An obituary for Timothy appeared in a local newspaper on the occasion of his death in 1934 (see inset). Little else is known about the fortunes of other members of John Wilson's family, although a number of them are buried in Charlestown Cemetery in Baildon. Their memorial is shown below and reads:



IN MEMORY OF
WILLIAM WILSON
DIED FEB 26TH 1890 AGED 64 YEARS.
ALSO SARAH, WIFE OF THE ABOVE,
DIED MAY 22ND 1891, AGED 72 YEARS.
ALSO HARRIET, DAUGHTER OF THE ABOVE,
DIED SEPT 17TH 1914, AGED 57 YEARS.
ALSO ARTHUR, SON OF THE ABOVE,
DIED MAY 10TH 1934, AGED 68 YEARS.
ALSO TIMOTHY WILLIAM, SON OF THE ABOVE,
DIED NOV 70TH 1934, AGED 74 YEARS

Stoneferry Tin Works

John Wilson purchased a plot of land on Stoneferry Road, close to Reckitt's premises in Dansom Lane, where he built a new factory. It appears that he sold his premises in Shipley to a company making machinery for manufacturing canisters, as a firm known as Barker, Spink & Lease were operating at Park Works, Rosse Street, Shipley, in 1903. They are listed as manufacturers of automated turret lathes[6] and had moved from smaller premises in Bradford.

By 1905, John Wilson's business in Hull was outgrowing the factory in Stoneferry Road and he purchased an adjacent plot of land from the trustees of the charity estates of Leonard Chamberlain. The purchase price was £4,500 of which Wilson paid a 10% deposit, with the remainder to be paid by 30th May 1908. Interest of 3.5% was to be paid on the balance which committed Wilson to making payments of £70. 17s 6d every six months until the loan was repaid. It seems that he was not always a prompt payer, as final demand letters from the vendors solicitors prove. When faced with such a letter on 11th June 1906, Wilson replied, "you will have to leave this matter in abeyance until I have time to come down and see you." In the end, he probably paid up, as two days later he received a reply stating, "I am directed by the Trustees to ask you to please let me have a cheque for the amount before Friday next [the 15th], otherwise we shall have no alternative but to place the matter in the hands of our solicitor."[7]

The plot a land purchased by John Wilson was described as:

> All that piece or parcel of ground situate on the West side of Stoneferry Road in the City and County of Kingston upon Hull estimated to contain 3.925 acres or thereabouts bounded on the North side by hereditaments of the Hull & Barnsley Railway Company and on the South side in parts by hereditaments of the Purchaser and in remaining part by hereditaments of the Trustees of William Henry Harrison Broadley deceased on the East by the Stoneferry Road and on the West by the River Hull.

At the time of the sale, there were tenants leasing part of this land and Wilson could not start building until they had removed. One of these tenants was a Mr. G. M. Taits who wrote to John Wilson on 11 April 1906 as follows:

[6] Automatic turret lathes enabled the rapid cutting of metal parts into predetermined shapes.
[7] DDCT/3/2/1, The Treasure House, Beverley

Sir,
I hereby give you notice to remove all your property off the land occupied by me before Monday the 16th April. In default of you not complying with this order, I shall place this matter in the hands of my solicitor.

Signed: G.M. Taits

To which John Wilson replied, on 16th May 1906, directly to the vendor's solicitor:

There must be some misunderstanding between you, myself and the tenant. I took the privilege of putting a few empty cases on to the land and the tenant sent me a note as per copy enclosed. As I have no time to attend to summonses, I saw Mr. Tate [sic] and told him I would take the cases away, and that I should have nothing further to say about the land until you could give it to me when you had been relieved of Tate's tenancy.
Yours truly, John Wilson

The headed notepaper on which John Wilson wrote described his company as:

STONEFERRY TIN WORKS, HULL
JOHN WILSON
CROMO PRINTS ON TIN
MANUFACTURERS OF ENAMELLED
TIN BOXES AND CANISTERS
OF EVERY DESCRIPTION
Telegrams: Wilson, Stoneferry Works, Hull.
Telephone: 1370 Hull

At its height, John Wilson's factory employed about 1000 people, but shortly after extending his factory by building on his newly acquired plot of land, he received an offer from Reckitt & Sons that he was unable to refuse. Up to 1907, the Reckitt's purchased their supply of tin containers for their various commodities from John Wilson. However, Reckitt's business had expanded rapidly during this period and this led its directors to review the question of making their own tin containers and so controlling this important branch of their packing arrangements. As a result, in October 1907 they purchased the business from John Wilson. This gave Reckitt's direct control over the supply of containers vitally necessary for metal polish and other products. The sum negotiated was, reportedly, £150,000[8] with Wilson having no further controlling interest in the

[8] £150,000 in 1907 equates to roughly £18.5m in 2020.

company. Whether he was retained in an advisory capacity for a short period is not known.

This left John Wilson, now nearly 60 years old, with a large bank balance. Although there would have been loans to repay, he was now a very wealthy man. Brought up as the son of a farm labourer in West Yorkshire, John Wilson had done well for himself and his family. His next decision was how to invest this vast sum of money.

Shipley and Canister Manufacture

In addition to John Wilson, at least one other company was manufacturing metal canisters in Shipley at the turn of the 20th century. F. Atkins & Co. was established in 1897 and about the same time as John Wilson's move to Hull, Atkins also moved across to Hull from Shipley. He was the main supplier of metal containers to Hargreaves Brothers & Co. manufacturers of a product known as 'Gipsy Black Metal Polish'. Purchasing land in the Dairycoates area of the city, Atkins set up his factory in Devon Street, off Hessle High Road, in premises adjacent to Hargreaves' factory. The area subsequently became known as Gipsyville, the name being derived from the name of the polish made by Hargreaves Brothers. Atkins' business was acquired by the Metal Box company in 1921, whilst Hargreaves Brothers were taken over by Reckitt's the following year.

Meanwhile, canister manufacture continued in Shipley, a works recorded there in 1911 remaining in business until at least 1927. In the early 1930s, a company known today as Carnaud Metal Box (CMB), began manufacture of can making machinery in Shipley. Now owned by Crown Holdings Incorporated, one of the world's leading producers of metal packaging, CMB still thrives today in Shipley.

Shipley's ongoing involvement in the metal packaging industry is, perhaps, a legacy of John Wilson's pioneering work in the late 19th century. Indeed, maybe its roots can be traced back even further to Abraham Stansfield and the Garths of Idle.

John Wilson and South Ella

By the first half of 1909, John Wilson had purchased South Ella, which may have been empty for some time. It is not exactly certain when its previous occupants, Arthur and Beatrice Egginton, vacated the house and left for Bedford. However, once the house was in John Wilson's possession, he began to make plans for extensions and additional buildings.

In June 1909 came plans for new piggeries and conversion of stable buildings into cottages. The age of the motor car had arrived and John Wilson no longer had need of a horse and carriage, and a garage was built to accommodate his vehicle. Perhaps the first thing he had done with his newly-found wealth was to visit the local car dealer to buy the latest model.

John Wilson's architect, Wellsted, Dossor & Wellsted, was busy again two months later drawing up plans for a new lodge on Beverley Road at the entrance of the track up to South Ella Farm. This was to be a substantial, double-fronted house with four bedrooms. This house became known as 'Red Lodge' and, although changed somewhat since it was originally built, is still there today at 226 Beverley Road.

South Ella Estate at the time it was purchased by John Wilson in 1909

A sure sign that the farm was still thriving, despite Arthur Egginton's departure, were John Wilson's plans for a new cow house and dairy, for which plans were drawn up by the architects in September 1909. The construction of these facilities indicates a shift from the beef production of Arthur Egginton's day to milk production. The bailiff at South Ella Farm for much of John Wilson's tenure of the estate was a man named John Calvert.

Perhaps renovations were also being carried out in the main house prior to the Wilsons moving in, as they remained in their old home in Sutton for a number of months before taking up occupancy of South Ella. However, by the middle of 1910, they were in residence with plans for a further cottage, with two bedrooms, living room, kitchen, scullery and pantry, bathroom and coal house,

in the grounds behind the main house. The architect on this occasion was T. Beecroft Atkinson, 11 Trinity House Lane, Hull.

Hammond's Store

Not only was John Wilson developing the estate at South Ella he was also building up his property portfolio elsewhere. One of his acquisitions was a plot land in the centre of Hull, bounded by Jameson Street, West Street and South Street. It was not long before potential buyers for this land approached him with an offer to purchase it. These were the Powell brothers, owners of Hammonds, a local department store[9]. They purchased John Wilson's land and adjacent plots totalling around 4,600 square yards and on it built a magnificent emporium which, sadly, thirty years later suffered irreparable damage during the bombing of Hull during the Second World War.

Hammond's Store, Paragon Square, Hull, 1930s, built in 1912 on land previously owned by John Wilson.

This was not the only connection that John Wilson had with the Powell family. Shortly after the Wilsons had moved to Hull and settled in Sutton, Samuel Powell, the youngest of the three brothers, married Mary, the daughter of John and Sarah Wilson. The wedding took place in late 1902. Samuel lived at Tilworth Grange in Sutton-on-Hull (the same house that was occupied years earlier by Edward and Frances Spence of whom we read in Part 3 of this story). Therefore, he would have been a neighbour of the Wilsons during the time they lived at Sutton. All the children of Samuel and Mary (Henry, John, William and George) took the second name Wilson, their second son, John Wilson Powell, in the fullness of time, becoming Chairman of Hammonds. William Wilson Powell eventually joined a firm of chartered accountants in Leeds.

[9] The Powells, originally from Brighouse, West Yorkshire, owned Hammonds from 1889, when they purchased the business from H.W. Hammond. The family sold the business in 1972 to House of Fraser.

Meanwhile, John and Sarah's son, Charles Stansfield, had married Bertha Dawson of Skirlaugh in late 1904. By 1911, they had a daughter, Mary aged 5, and were living at Oldcotes Manor, between Doncaster and Worksop. It is possible that Charles had received a cut of the money his father had received from Reckitt's, thus, providing capital to purchase this substantial house in rural Nottinghamshire. Later on, Charles and Bertha removed to a property near St. Austell in Cornwall, where Bertha eventually died in January 1938 at the age of 53. A year later Charles remarried. His new wife was Alice Maud Good, the widow of Mr. R. W. Good of The Hermitage, Snaresbrook, Essex. However, it was a short marriage, as Alice Wilson died in April 1941 at the age of 46. Charles married for a third time in 1943 to a lady by the name of Florence Helen Gladys Shakespeare Greener whose family came from the West Midlands.

Charles died on 12th September 1956 at Belstone Lodge in Sidmouth, Devon leaving £5,700 to his wife. Florence lived on for another six years and at the time of her death was living at 2 Eridge Road, Tunbridge Wells. She died at Pembury Hospital in the town, leaving the substantial sum of £24,000 in her Will.

Hotels and Buses

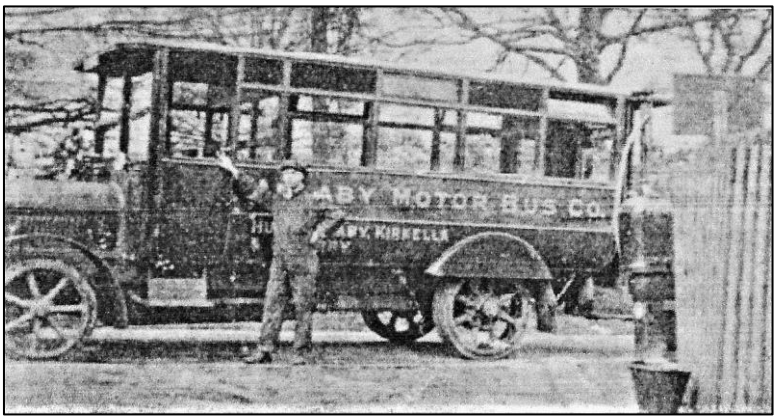
The Imperial Hydro Hotel, Hornsea, 1916

As we have seen, after the sale of his canister business, John Wilson was becoming a man of property and in 1912 he purchased a choice plot close to the promenade at Hornsea, where he saw an opportunity to provide the town with a superior kind of hotel. The Imperial Hydro opened in summer 1913 and featured luxurious mahogany panelled rooms, a theatre, a ballroom, Turkish baths, an indoor swimming pool and a bowling green.

During the construction of the bowling green, several early Anglo-Saxon burials, dating from the 6th century, together with associated grave goods, were discovered. As soon as local archaeologists, including Tom Sheppard, curator of Hull Museum, heard about the find they hurried to Hornsea, eager to investigate. They received a rebuff from John Wilson, who told them in no uncertain terms that he was far too busy with the building work to entertain

them. However, Sheppard managed to sweet talk Wilson who, in the end, gave him permission to investigate further. As a result, Sheppard returned with one of his staff and excavated the cemetery, publishing an account of the Hornsea Hydro excavation in the Hull Museum Publications in 1919.[10] When the First World War broke out, the hotel was commandeered by the Army and it did not reopen to the public, for a variety of reasons, until 1936.[11] It is doubtful, therefore, that John Wilson profited much from the enterprise.

By now, John Wilson was in his late-sixties but, despite the set-back of having his hotel out of commission, he turned his hand to a fresh enterprise and, in 1915, he set up his own motor bus company in Anlaby. The Anlaby Motor Company ran a service from Willerby to Hull in competition with similar businesses run by Samuel Binnington of Willerby, and the Hull & Barnsley Railway, the latter having a station for passengers in Willerby[12]. The Anlaby Motor Bus Company also ran a service from Hull to Brough. Wilson's motor bus business flourished for some years before its vehicles and garage were taken over by Hull and District Motor Services Ltd. in 1921. Eventually, this company was incorporated into the business of East Yorkshire Motor Services.



Anlaby Motor Bus Co., 1916. A Tilling-Stevens model from John Wilson's fleet.

South Ella Farm

Following the sale of Arthur Egginton's prize herd of Aberdeen Angus cattle in 1901, South Ella Farm was let out to tenant farmers. On 6th April 1916, John Wilson came to an agreement with Francis William Hunt, dairy farmer, formerly of Pickering Road, Hull, who took over the tenancy from the above date on a

[10] More information about the excavations can be found at:
http://museumcollections.hullcc.gov.uk/collections/storydetail.php?irn=613&master=449

[11] In 1936, the hotel was purchased by the Friendship Holiday Association and the name was changed to Granville Court. After being occupied by the military during the Second World War, the hotel reopened, but it never attracted the numbers of guests that were originally envisaged. By the mid-1980s, after several changes of ownership and conversion into private apartments, the building was being used to accommodate homeless people, and in 1988 it was condemned. In July 1990 it was badly damaged by fire and was subsequently demolished.

[12] This was Willerby and Kirk Ella Station located close to Willerby Square. Springhead Halt, a station serving Anlaby, was built in 1929.

five-year lease. His annual rental was £360, payable in two half-yearly instalments. Hunt also agreed to pay £50 per acre for every acre of grassland which he "converted into tillage". The lease included 'all that messuage or farm house with the farm buildings and closes or parcels of land adjoining, 120 acres or thereabouts.' At the time of the agreement, 18.5 acres of the estate were listed as being arable, with just over 100 acres being pasture. Farming equipment included 'gas engine, shafting, belting, turnip cutter, grinding mill, cake crusher and chopping machine'.[13]

At this time, changes in land usage were a matter of national debate as the country was in the midst of the First World War, and there was concern over food supply. Overall, 60 per cent of the nation's food requirement and 80 per cent of its wheat was imported making it very vulnerable to enemy action. Across the country, local commissioners visited all the farms in their area and advised farmers on ways to improve productivity and which parts of their land they should turn over to arable production. As the war progressed, this became a more pressing matter and, in early 1918, with no end to the war in sight, the local branch of the War Agricultural Committee ordered Francis Hunt to plough out a large amount of the pasture at South Ella and turn it over to arable land to support the war effort.

Hunt's solicitor, Andrew M. Jackson, replied to the Committee in uncompromising fashion:

> We did not know whether your committee are aware of the fact that the grassland at South Ella is old grass, which will be ruined if ploughed out. This will necessitate a heavy claim being put forward before the Defences of the Realm Leases Committee.
> Moreover, the land in question has been let for a dairy farm for years. It is now in the occupation of a dairy farmer whose produce of milk, etc. serves the public. In these circumstances and having regard to the shortage of milk supply which is likely to be aggravated, we suggest for the careful consideration of your committee that the order addressed to our client tenant, Mr. F.W. Hunt, should be revoked or at any rate suspended until further consideration…...

Which side was the winner in this argument has not been discovered, although South Ella remained a successful dairy farm until the mid-20th century.

The first two years of Francis Hunt's tenancy were not straightforward. Around the same time as the threat to his dairy business from the War Agricultural

[13] C DBHT/5/578, Hull History Centre

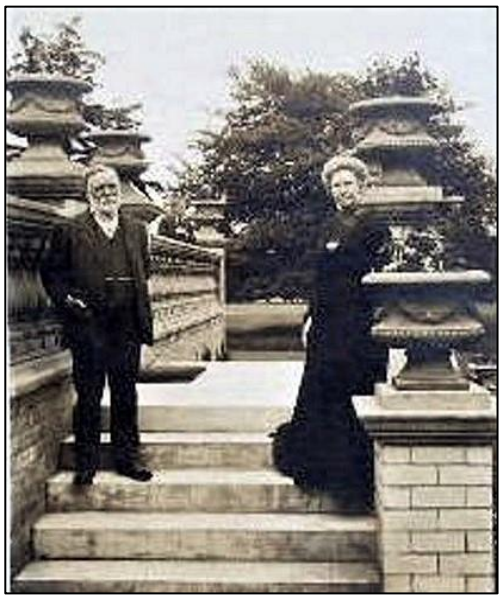
Committee, he complained about the poor state of the fences and hedges around the farm, which had been made worse by damage caused by tree felling in 1917. Again, this was a matter that he referred to his solicitor, who took up his case, reporting on the extensive damage caused by the men who carried out the timber cutting. Prior to this work being carried out, John Wilson was warned 'that serious damage would be done', he later replying that, 'every reasonable care was taken by his men who are used to the work, the foreman having twenty years experience in tree felling.' It was further claimed by Hunt that, 'in many instances, small saplings and shrubs, which would have filled the gaps caused by removing the large trees have either been chopped down to facilitate felling or dragged up by snigging out the tree trunks.'

It was two years before the repair work was eventually completed in early 1919 by a Mr. Stubbs, who charged £43 18s 2d for his work, although against this he credited £5 for timber from the estate that he reused. His original quotation was at the rate of 3s 0d per yard, so his final bill gives an idea of the extensive nature of the repair work carried out. [14]

Perhaps all this was too much for Francis Hunt as, on 17th December 1919, an announcement appeared in the Hull Daily Mail stating that he was 'giving up cow keeping' and the tenancy of South Ella Farm was to become vacant.

In memoriam

Most of Francis Hunt's woes were unbeknown to John Wilson as, before the repercussions of the timber cutting fully emerged, he died suddenly following a heart attack on the steps in Hull railway station, on 1st March 1917. After a funeral service at St. Andrew's Church, Kirk Ella four days later, John Wilson was laid to rest in Mill Lane Cemetery within sight of South Ella, the house he had made his home for the previous eight years. He was 68 years old.

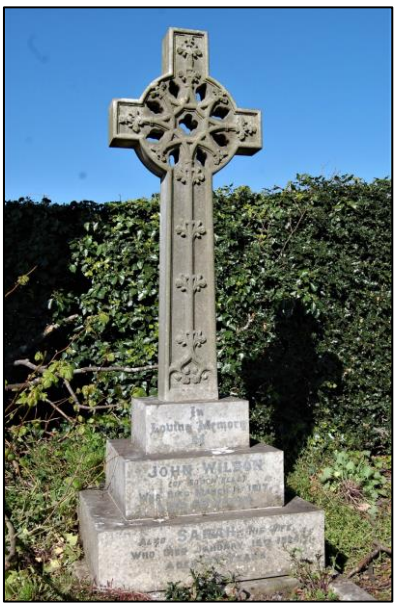


John and Sarah Wilson, c1913. Location unknown but, perhaps, on the terrace at South Ella.

Sarah remained at South Ella for a short time after her husband's death but relocated to Hornsea where she lived out her days at

[14] Ibid.

Earlham House on Marine Road. It was there that she died at the age of 75 on 19th January 1924. Three days later, she was reunited with her husband in the plot at Mill Lane Cemetery.



Memorial to John and Sarah Wilson. Mill Lane Cemetery, Kirk Ella.

John Wilson's affairs were left in the hands of his Trustees, one of whom was Walter G. Hall of Buckley & Hall, Accountants, Victoria Chambers, Bowlalley Lane, Hull. The Trustees may have been in touch with Arthur Egginton, as a diary note, dated Monday 28th August 1918, from one of their number states, 'had a chat with Arthur re. South Ella valuation.' The diary entry goes on to record that John Wilson had previously estimated the value of the property to be around £17,000 and '[I]told Arthur the same', but he reckoned that we 'should not look at less than £21,000 and should not be surprised, if not in a hurry, might realise £200 per acre – £28,000'.

How much the next owner of South Ella was prepared to pay for the estate remained to be seen.

Thanks go to many people, both members of AWAKE U3A and others, in helping to gather information for this episode in the life of South Ella. The information submitted by Ian Gibbs to The [Bradford] Telegraph & Argus in August 2010 was most helpful in enabling the discovery of many of the West Yorkshire locations. The help of staff at The Treasure House, Beverley, and Hull History Centre has been very much appreciated. Special thanks are reserved for Christine Gibbs who researched and provided much of the genealogical information.

Francis Davies
October 2020