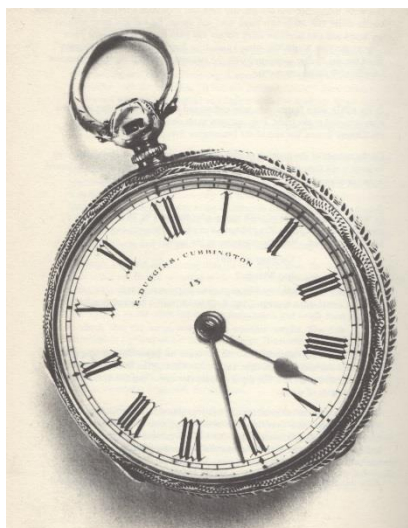


Edward Duggins, Watchmaker



The Duggins family were originally blacksmiths in Berkswell, and Barston, but Joseph Duggins and his wife Ann came to settle in Cubbington in about 1856. Edward, their third child and second son, was born there in 1857. Copies of the Leamington Courier of the time reveal that the blacksmith's extended family became prolific prize winners at local shows for their fruit, vegetable and flower-growing. Edward once won the top prize for two cabbages! - but chose the skilled trade of watchmaking as his career, doubtless in nearby Coventry where there was a long tradition of skilled watch and clock making. Edward married a Coventry dressmaker, Elizabeth Brown in about 1880, and opened a small shop in Queen Street.

In the 1881 Census for Queen Street, Edward is described as a 'Watchmaker (Finisher)', - a highly skilled technical job which involved checking and regulating the mechanism in the final stage of production. A History Trail leaflet, *'Watchmaking in Coventry'* published by the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum gives finishing as "one of the most skilful and important areas of [watch and clock] production". What it also clarifies is the way that watches had long been manufactured in Coventry, in a process involving 102 different skills. In the early 19th century when Coventry watchmaking was a major industry, watch components manufactured in Prescot, Lancashire were sent to Coventry to form the core of the Coventry watch-making business, which was often carried out in small home workshops (top shops). There were only two large manufacturing units at the time, and the top shops were effectively a production-line, but home-based rather than in one large factory. Each man and his apprentice worked in their home base on the part requiring their specialist skill, and then passed the pieces on for the next stage to be completed.

Although no details are given, Edward Duggins is listed as a clockmaker based in Cubbington 1880-1894 in Joseph McKenna's *'Watch & Clockmakers of Warwickshire (1436-1900)'* He was paid £6.13.8 as part of the Cubbington church restoration account in 1885, - a not inconsiderable sum in those days. Could it have been for repairs to the church clock? At all events, Mr E Duggins subscribed 10/- towards the Church Restoration Fund. In *'Cubbington'* (1971), GF Peppitt quotes a Sports Programme of 1884, which had an advertisement by 'Mr E Duggins, watchmaker and repairer.' The illustrations of a lady's watch (right and above) show a sample of Duggins' beautifully crafted work, a 21st birthday gift, with the engraving inside, "Cubbington 1881. Jane Whitehall".

The Duggins' remained in the village for another decade, and then moved with their two sons and four daughters to Dovecote, Cubbington Road, Lillington to the house and shop next to the present television shop. As Edward established his business, the family became deeply involved in Lillington village life, singing in St Mary Magdalene Church Choir, and in many local concerts and fund raising events. In May 1909, in his role as Parish Clerk, Edward Duggins joined the party 'Beating the Bounds' of the Parish. The 11-mile circuit was completed in six



hours. Edward joined the party at Blackdown, covering about half the distance, but his son Frank completed the entire circuit.

All four Duggins daughters trained as Elementary School teachers. James, the older son was the star pupil at the local Art School and went on to become a professional artist and illustrator and photographer. Frank was set to follow his father into the family business but sadly was killed in action in the summer of 1915. He is commemorated on the Lillington Parish Church Roll of Honour and on the War Memorial in the grounds.

In 1894, Edward Duggins was appointed to the post of Parish clerk and caretaker of St Mary Magdalene's at a salary of £15 per annum, (the equivalent of approximately £1500 in today's money) a post he held until his death in the summer of 1926. This role sometimes required rather more than attendance at Vestry Meetings: in 1895, Edward was summoned as a witness before the magistrates when the alms box was stolen from the church porch after Edward had locked up for the night. He was called by the police the following day, when the iron gates protecting the porch were found forced open and the lock of the alms box smashed and its contents stolen. He later gave evidence before the magistrates when four young offenders from the less affluent parts of Leamington had been arrested. The miscreants were subsequently fined.

Edward Duggins and family were pillars of the local community. His legacy, and that of Elizabeth his wife, rest not only in the heirloom pieces that Edward crafted to order, nor their memorial in the churchyard, but in the talented family whose skills were nurtured at the heart of Lillington village.

Sources: *Leamington Spa Courier* Archive; National Archives *Census Returns 1841 -1911*

History Trail leaflet, '*Watchmaking in Coventry*' published by the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum