

## Frederick George Hands 1878 - 1969



Fred Hands was born at Eathorpe in January 1878, the ninth of the twelve children and youngest of the four sons of Jane and George Hands, a Master Blacksmith. By the age of twelve Fred was already out at work as a farmhand at Fosse Farm, Offchurch, up at 5 am winter and summer, milking cows and doing menial farm labouring jobs. He wasn't paid for his work: as he lived at the farm, his 'keep' was the only wage he had.

In his early twenties, Fred returned home and took up his father's trade, but still never earned money until he went to work for a saddler at Brinklow, - for thirteen shillings a week. His next move took him to Marton where he spent seven years working for an uncle who was also a blacksmith. He also worked for a time in Bedford, where he met his future wife Gertrude Annie Hulatt. By 1908, Fred, Gertrude Annie and baby son Leslie Frederick were living in

Lillington, with Fred working first for Sam Allcock in Tavistock Street and then Sam's brother Tom in Windsor Street, Leamington. Finding work was not a problem: as almost everyone seemed to own horses in those days, a blacksmith was always in demand, and the smithy a very busy cheerful place.

Another move brought Fred to the forge at Manor Farm, where he worked for the McGregor family. Amongst others, he shod Sydney McGregor's famous Derby winner *April the Fifth* and the Grand National champion *Bogskar*. Fred lost count of the number of animals he shod in his long working life, from ponies, donkeys, shire horses and first world war cavalry horses to the celebrated racing breeds - probably many thousands.



He was still at work in his eighties, - but as the motor car started to take over from the horse, he decided it was time to diversify. He became Basil Thwaites' first employee when he set up Thwaites Agricultural Engineering Company, turning up to work at 10am until 4pm, to make and repair all kinds of engineering tools associated with the business. In an interview with the Leamington Courier at the age of 84, Fred said how he wished he was still shoeing horses, but recognised that mechanisation had changed everything, that electric welding had become the order of the day. His only regret was that it hadn't been invented when he started out.

Fred and Gertrude Hands lived at 2 Farm Road with their two sons Leslie and Eric, and daughter Kathleen Nancy. They were active churchgoers: Fred served on the Parochial Church Council from its inception and was a sidesman from as early as 1908. For most of his adult life, Fred sang in the choir at St Mary Magdalene, joined later by his son-in-law, Tom Harris and grandson David. In the 1950s choir photograph (below) Fred can be seen 6<sup>th</sup> from the left, middle row, Tom is 4<sup>th</sup> from the right in the same row, and David is sitting cross-legged in the middle of the front row.



Before she married in 1938, Kathleen Hands was a Sunday School teacher, and then a pillar of the W. I. and the Mothers' Union, known to many as 'Catering Kath', for her cake-making and formidable skills of organisation. Fred and Gertrude's children were baptised, confirmed and married – and later buried – at St Mary Magdalene. Their grandchildren too were baptised and married there.

The Hands' family interest in their home village was not confined to the church: Fred and his wife owned a copy of William Cooper's 1940 publication, *The History of Lillington*, complete with a hand-written receipt from the author. They were near neighbours of Herbert Edward and Margaret Cox, and had a small collection of Cox watercolours. One shows the lake in Jephson Gardens, another, the church by moonlight, - now a family heirloom in the care of Fred's great-grandson.

*Compiled by Margaret Rushton from information and photographs supplied by Fred's granddaughter Gill Moss*