

# BLACKSMITHS OF STONELEIGH



Circa 1918

A Smithy has been on or near the present site on the village green since at least the sixteenth century, working to repair cartwheels, manufacture wrought iron and to shoe horses; **John Capp** was recorded as the village blacksmith between 1599 and 1639, living in a cottage near the green: the parish register records his burial in February of that year, and a map of 1597 certainly shows a building on the green, which could be the smithy.

Parish registers also name several other villagers as blacksmiths during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: **Thomas Jervice** (or **Jarvis**) is named as such in 1634 and is also described as a gun-maker in 1638, leaving at his death a year later £39 as well as “gun barrels, steele, walnut tree planks and tooles”. **Nathaniel Wigston** and **John Hall** are named as smiths in the registers of 1698, 1699 and 1701, followed by **John Muddiman** as blacksmith in 1703 and 1705. In the mid-eighteenth century **William Howlett** is named as a blacksmith – he was buried in February 1762. We do not know, of course, whether they plied their trade at the building on the Green.

The present building was erected in 1851 and we know that the village supported many blacksmiths, wheelwrights and farriers throughout the nineteenth century.

Although in the early days we do not know which men actually worked from the Smithy on the Green, Census information gives us the following details:

*In 1841:*

Three blacksmiths – **John Landers**, **William Howlett** and **John Woodfield** - are listed, together with four wheelwrights: the **Holmes** family – **Thomas**, **John** and **Eusabius**, and **Richard Thompson**.

*In 1851:*

**Thomas Holmes** is a wheelwright employing 4 men, together with his son **John**.

*In 1861:*

**Thomas Holmes** is listed as a Master Wheelwright employing 5 men; his son **John** is now termed a Journeyman Wheelwright and Thomas' servant **John King** is described as a Journeyman Blacksmith.

*In 1871* more detailed addresses are given in the Census, and thus:

**Charles Prime** aged 17 is a Blacksmith at Stareton, whilst at The Wheelwright's Shop **Thomas Holmes**, now 79 and "Wheelwright and Blacksmith", is joined by his servant **Henry Smith**, a wheelwright and **Mark Chattaway**, his nephew, a blacksmith.

*In 1881:*

**Edwin Flint** first appears, who was to continue as the village blacksmith for 30 years. He is 47 and lives at 9 Birmingham Road with his son **Albert**, also a blacksmith. Two further blacksmiths reside in Stoneleigh: living on The Bank is **William Clark**, and **Edward G Wheatley**, living on Coventry Road.

*In 1891:*

**Edwin and Albert Flint** are still working as blacksmiths and are joined by **George Freeman** who lives on Birmingham Road

## Edward Langley Fardon

Between arriving in Stoneleigh in 1874 and his death in 1926, **Edward Langley Fardon** is probably the most famous of Stoneleigh's blacksmiths, though his skills were considerably more extensive. By the end of his long life he was well known in his community, and was the subject of a number of press reports in old age and when he died. He lived at 2, Church Place.

With his eldest half-brother Emmanuel living and working in London and his next elder having died as a young man, Edward took over the family blacksmith business, expanded it and handed it on to his own son, but not before having first ploughed his independent furrow, in Coventry, London and abroad. Perhaps as a result of his experience in the wider world Edward became a skilled exponent of the ornamental blacksmith's art, responsible for ornamental gates both at home and abroad, and also smaller household objects, some of which remain in the Fardon family.



The Fardon family at 2, Church Place

Edward was born in Leamington in late 1839 and was at home in 1841 and 1851, listed on the latter date as a scholar. He worked at home until 1857 when he went into employment at Skidmore's in Coventry. This was a fast-developing business. Francis Skidmore had exhibited at the Great Exhibition of 1851 and

he was renovating a number of churches in Coventry. At around this time he met the great architect Sir George Gilbert Scott and the two collaborated, with Skidmore building Scott's designs, for example the screen in Hereford Cathedral, and the Albert Memorial in London. Skidmore would become one of the best metalwork craftsmen in the country, his innovative iron, brass and silverwork gaining him acclaim and commissions. All this must have had a great influence on Edward and on his own later work, particularly if he met or was influenced also by Scott; and it must help explain the high quality of Edward's work.

Edward could not have been long enough at Skidmore's for an apprenticeship. Over the next four years he had taken employment in London and then spent several months, probably in 1860-61, working in Switzerland and France. According to a newspaper report he walked from Coventry to London (it took him 4½ days), and then worked in a street off Cheapside. It was from here that he was sent abroad to work at Baron Rothschild's houses in Switzerland and at Boulogne (one report says "near Paris", could it thus have been the Bois de Boulogne area in that city?), where he created the wrought-iron gates. This must have been during the winter of 1860-61, for Edward's passport, which is in the family's possession, for the journey to Geneva, was dated 24<sup>th</sup> October 1860; also, he has not been found in the British national census which was taken on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1861. Bearing in mind his young age his skills must have been impressive. Perhaps to this time belongs his work on the ornamental gates for Lord Dudley at Witley Court in Worcestershire; at St Anthony's Hall in Cornwall, and at St Clement Dane Church in London. These are known from family and press sources; there may also have been other work attributable to Edward.

Edward's father died at the turn of 1864-1865, and Edward had returned to Kenilworth by June 1865, when second daughter Tryphena was born there. Press sources report that he took over his father's business in 1865; in Kelly's for that and subsequent years he is shown as blacksmith, first at Castle End, Kenilworth, where his father had operated, later at 2 Church Place, Stoneleigh, near the church and next to the Old Vicarage. Probably five children were born at Kenilworth, with three more at Stoneleigh.

The move to Stoneleigh is reported to have been in 1873 at the request of Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh Abbey, and he was to work as "an engineer in the minor branches". An accounts book in the possession of descendants lists all the work

done for the Abbey, and shows that Edward was not a salaried employee, but more like a self-employed worker. The book gives details of work done, its cost, and details of periodic payments made to him by Lord Leigh. Here Edward would live until his death some 50 years later.

It was while working at Stoneleigh that the Leigh family commissioned Edward to create the gates for the family park and also at the Grecian Lodge. There are other similar commission farther afield that may date from this period.



*Fardon gates at Stoneleigh Abbey*

Information from the directories and censuses shows the expansion of what must have been a successful business. It eventually became Edward Fardon & Son, reflecting the presence of Edward's son Charles Langley who would eventually in his turn take over the business. The emphasis changes over the years from simply blacksmith/whitesmith to "engineer", including heating and this would continue under son Charles.

In summary:

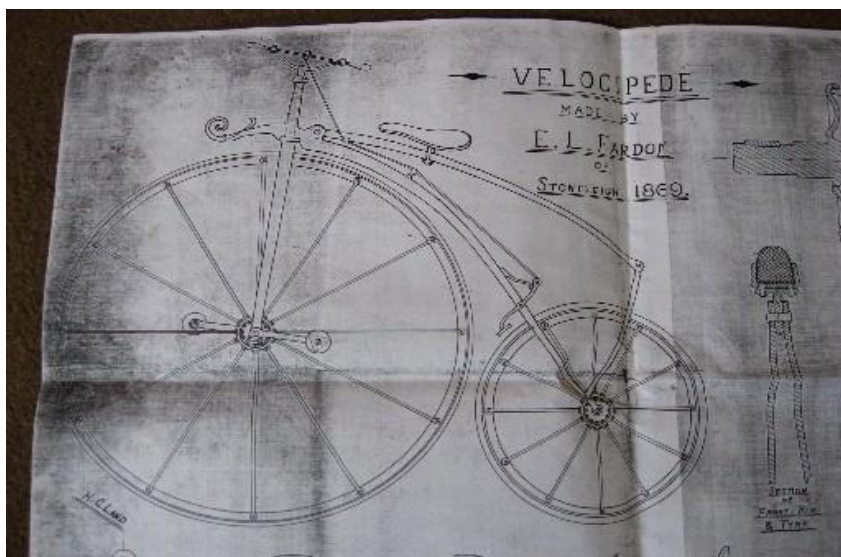
- 1870-74      blacksmith (whitesmith) at Castle End, Kenilworth
- 1874          move to Stoneleigh
- 1876-1880   shoeing and general smith, wheelwright
- 1881          master blacksmith at 2 Church Place, Stoneleigh, employing 2 men and one apprentice
- 1884-1900   business described variously as ironmonger, engineer, machinist, general smith and once (1888) also timber merchant and farmer. Still at 2 Church Place, Stoneleigh
- 1901          heating engineer and iron worker at 2 Church Place, Stoneleigh
- 1904-1924   as Edward Fardon & Son, ironmongers and engineers to 1916, just engineers after WW1, address not shown
- 1911          heating engineer and art metal worker iron gates and general ornamental ironlink [sic] at Stoneleigh



**The bicycle pioneer**

One claim to fame is Edward being credited with building the first iron bicycle with rubber tyres, and to have built the first suspension wheel for it, a project which would appear to have occupied him during his first years at Kenilworth one report says that it was made in 1868, and the blueprint drawings, which the family still have, are dated 1869. The blueprints show a "penny-farthing"-type model.

Edward did not patent his idea and is said to have shown it to Starley, the cycle maker in Coventry, who supposedly cashed in on the design.



Edward's wife Mary predeceased him, though not before celebrating their golden anniversary (in 1912). She died in 1915 at the age of 75. He himself died on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1926 at the age of 83 at Stoneleigh and he is buried next to Mary at the church there. A press report on Edward's funeral lists those present. The Leighs, owners of Stoneleigh Abbey, were represented by the Hon Cordelia Leigh who placed a wreath at the graveside marked "In affectionate remembrance from Lord and Lady Leigh, Miss Leigh, Miss Cordelia, Mr Rowland and Mr Robin Leigh".

A celebration in a local newspaper of Edward's birthday, headed *Stoneleigh Village Worthy At 83, A Noted Artistic Gate Maker*, is worth quoting, as it shows the respect and affection in which Edward was held.

*"On Monday next - for he was born on December 11, 1839 - Mr Edward L Fardon, the Stoneleigh village engineer and blacksmith, will attain the ripe old age of 83. There is no man better known or more respected in his own locality, and nobody in his own station of life has had so many distinguished visitors. Often guests at the [Stoneleigh] Abbey find their way across the park to see him in his well-built stone house. "Fardon of Stoneleigh" has a name for first-class gates erected at the entrances of mansions up and down the country. "He*

*was born in Leamington where his father had a whitesmith's business till he removed to Kenilworth. As a youth he was at Skidmore's works in Coventry, famous in that day for the high character of its metal products. In later years young Fardon was employed in London, and was sent to work at Baron Rothschild's mansions in Switzerland and at Boulogne, France. He worked on the ornamental gates at Witley Court Worcestershire. In 1865 he returned to Kenilworth, and after removing to Stoneleigh has since done the engineer's work of the Stoneleigh estate. The bicycle was just appearing, and in 1868 Mr Fardon made a machine all steel and with India rubber tyres.*

*"Mr Fardon tells many interesting stories of his countryside; he has "honourable mention" [in] published books of reminiscences, and his sitting-room is adorned with photographs of noblemen and gentlemen who have been his visitors from time to time, and who respect his personal worth and find keen interest in his career."*

This article was adapted by kind permission from one by Alan Harmer of the Fardon family.

Returning to our other blacksmiths,

### **In 1901**

**Edwin and Albert Flint** have an 18-year-old apprentice, **Ernest Worrall**, who lives on The Green.

Shortly after 1903 however, **William Sparrow**, then the blacksmith at Styvechale, where he continued to live, extended his remit to work in Stoneleigh, for Lord Leigh, and took as a young apprentice **John Goode**. Mr Sparrow combined his Styvechale work with work at Stoneleigh's Smithy until his death in 1942 and John Goode continued to work as a blacksmith until his own retirement in 1967, finally laying down his tools at the age of 79.

The Blacksmith's Shop is described as "Unoccupied" in the 1911 census. **Edwin Flint** is now living as a pensioner in the almshouses and his son **Albert** is a Blacksmith on the Estate, presumably working from another base

**John Goode** was succeeded at the Smithy in 1968 by **Tom Allison**, the wellknown farrier who won national awards, and he was joined after a while by his younger



brother **Tim**; ultimately Tom's son **Ian**, or "**Spud**" worked there for three or four years, into the early 1990s.



John Goode



Tom Allison

The Smithy lay empty for over ten years until a change of use was granted, and in 2007 after extensive and careful restoration by local craftsmen, the building was opened once more as a showroom for a local firm Midland Stoves and Fireplaces, run by Colin Rice. He and Peter Whitehouse received a design award from Warwick District Council in 2010 for the restoration, in recognition of a significant contribution made to the quality of the environment; it is a Grade II listed building within our Conservation Area. The Village Green, on which it stands, with its "spreading chestnut tree", is planted with bulbs and seasonal floral displays, together with the village Christmas tree.

It is a peaceful scene, far removed from the noise and activity of previous years' work!



*The Old Forge on The Green, 2008*

## Stoneleigh History Society

*Information initially compiled from censuses and births, marriages and burials register by Pam Baker, Lisa Reay and Sheila Woolf. Thanks to Mary Allison for information on Tom and Ian Allison, Peter Whitehouse on the Forge post-2006, and Gail Tomkins on John Goode. Detail on E L Fardon courtesy of Alan Harmer.*

*People - Booklet 2*

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