

Edward Langley Fardon



A Celebration

Stoneleigh Village

December 8th 2024

Who was Edward Langley Fardon?



A short biography:

Edward Langley Fardon was born in Leamington on December 11th 1839, and at the time of both the 1841 and 1851 census was living at home in Castle End, Kenilworth, where his father was a blacksmith. He worked at home until 1857 when he went into employment at the firm of renowned metal craftsman Skidmore in Coventry.

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 at Skidmore's long - certainly not long enough for an apprenticeship, for example; 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 the 98 miles 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 wrought-iron gates. This must have been during the

winter of 1860-61, since Edward's passport for the journey to Geneva was dated 24th October 1860; also, he has not been found in the British census which was taken on 7th April 1861. Bearing in mind his young age his skills must have been impressive.

He returned to London, and in September 1862 he married Mary Ann Cook at the parish church of St George's, Hanover Square in London. She was the daughter of a farmer and born in Wickham Market, Suffolk. Edward was shown as a smith on his marriage certificate.

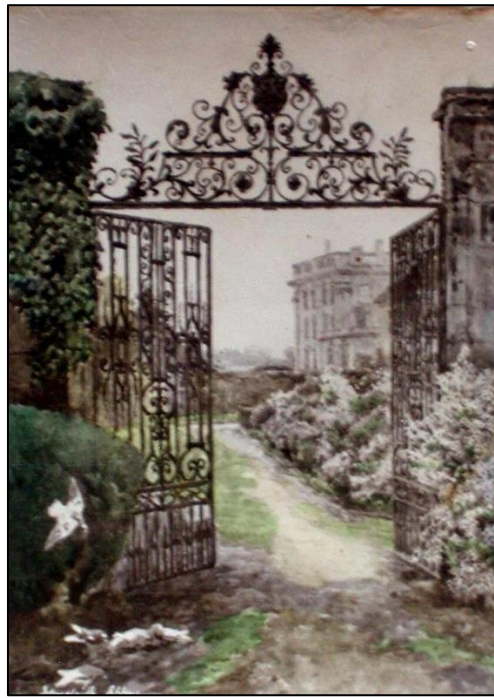
Perhaps it was during this time that he worked on the ornamental gates for Lord Dudley at Witley Court in Worcestershire, at St Anthony's Hall in Cornwall, and at St Clement Dane Church in London. These are known from family and press sources; there may also have been other work attributable to Edward.

With his eldest half-brother Emmanuel living and working in London and his next elder brother having died as a young man, Edward was to take over his father's business in Kenilworth, expand it and hand it on to his own son. 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 family.

His father having died at the turn of 1864-1865, Edward had returned to Kenilworth by June 1865, his second daughter Tryphena being born there. Press sources report that he took over his father's business in 1865; in Kelly's Directory 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 Parsonage. Probably five children were born at Kenilworth, with three more at Stoneleigh.

The move to Stoneleigh is reported to have been in 1874 at the request of Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh Abbey, and he was to work as "an engineer in the minor branches"; his father had worked for the Estate since arriving in the area in about 1814. 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 Lodges. An accounts book in the possession of descendants lists all the work done for the Leighs, 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. He was to remain in close contact with the Leighs for the rest of his life.

Edward remained living in Stoneleigh until his death some 50 years later.



Stoneleigh Abbey gates

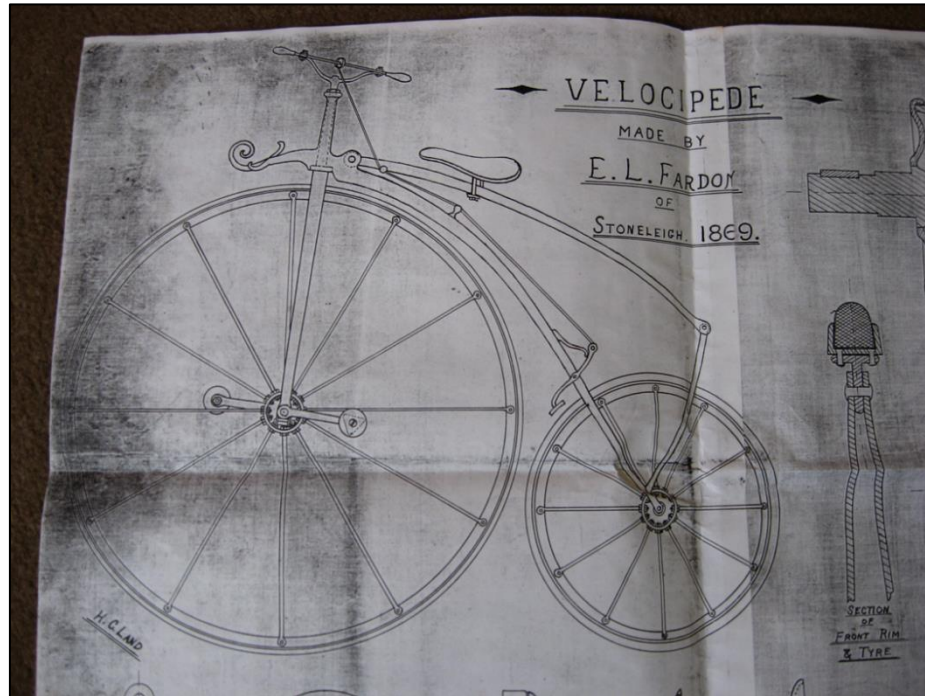
Information from the directories and censuses shows the expansion of what must have been a successful business. It eventually became Edward Fardon & Son, reflecting the presence of Edward's son Charles Langley who would eventually take over the business. The emphasis changes over the years from simply 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
- 1876-80 shoeing and general smith, wheelwright
- 1881 master blacksmith at 2 Church Place, Stoneleigh, employing 2 men and 1 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
- 1904-24 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 iron link (sic) at Stoneleigh.

The bicycle pioneer



Edward is frequently 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 they celebrated their golden wedding anniversary, in 1912. She died in 1915 at the age of 75. Edward himself died on 9th February 1926 at the age of 83 at Stoneleigh and he is buried next to Mary in the churchyard there. A press report about Edward's funeral lists the family members who were in attendance. All five surviving children living in England were present, as were a several grandchildren and also friends and acquaintances. The Leighs, from Stoneleigh Abbey, were represented by 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"

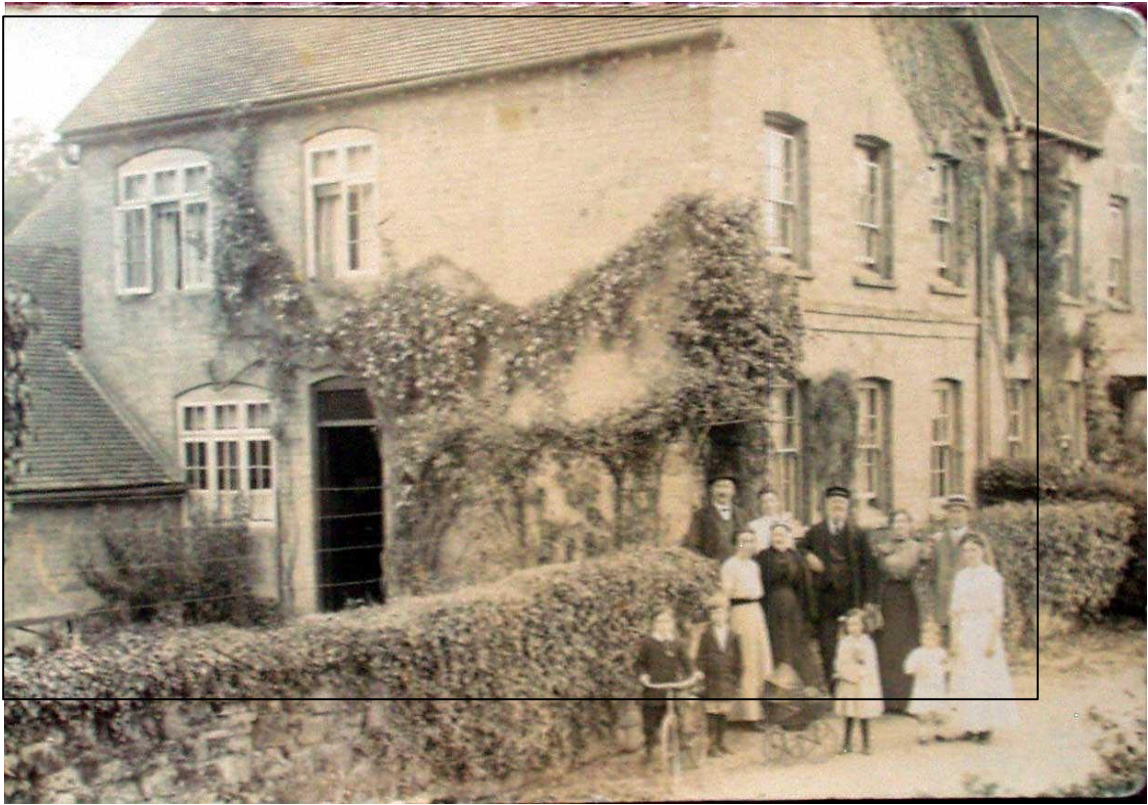
A celebration in a local newspaper, headed *Stoneleigh Village Worthy At 83, A Noted Artistic Gate Maker*, is worth quoting, as it shows the respect and affection in which Edward was held and endorses the facts given above:

"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."

Much of the above information was adapted with permission from an article by Alan Harmer of the Fardon family.



Fardon family group at 2, Church Place, Stoneleigh, c 1893



Today we are delighted to be honouring the achievements of Edward Langley Fardon by installing a commemorative blue plaque on the smithy on The Green, Stoneleigh. The

smithy is a Grade II listed building within our Conservation Area and is a muchloved focal point of the village.

The installation has been made possible by the creative skills of our own Stoneleigh villagers Adrian Clarke, Malcolm Murphy, Gareth Roberts and Martin Smith, continuing a fine tradition of design and technology.

Thanks are also due to Midland Stoves, Signcast of Bilston, Stoneleigh History Society, WMG University of Warwick, Peter Whitehouse and Sheila Woolf, and most of all, to the Fardon family for all their help.



Photograph by the late Will Blagburn ...combining the Smithy and a bicycle club on The Green!

Stoneleigh History Society