

Down Memory Lane - John Watts *(as recorded by Mary Gurteen)*

The Family

Great Grandfather and Great Grandmother:	George and Sarah
Grandfather and Grandmother:	Arthur and May
Father and Mother:	Leonard and Hilda

The Watts family has lived in Swannington, in the same house, now called The Firs, since 1902. These are some of John Watts's memories and stories of his family.

John vividly remembers his grandparents, with whom he spent many hours of his childhood, but it was his great grandparents, George and Sarah Watts, who came to The Firs in 1902.

Great Grandfather George was the Swannington postman. Every day he walked the four miles to Cawston to collect the post, and then delivered round the village. George and Sarah had two sons, George (who went to London to seek his fortune), and John's grandfather, Arthur.

Grandfather Arthur was full of fun, and photographs show him clowning for the camera. He started his working life as an apprentice gardener, and learnt then many of the basic skills which he put to use in later life. He went on, like many Norfolk men at that time, to work on the railways as a signaller. On his mother's death in 1922 he returned to Swannington, bringing with him his bride, who rejoiced in the name of May Fullerlove, and their young sons, Leonard and Arthur junior, known as Eddie.

Arthur was a remarkably resourceful man. While working as a signaller he learnt first to repair (taught by his mother) and then to make shoes. The latter skill was gained by taking apart a pair of boots and observing how they were made. Impressed by Arthur's skills the station master asked him to make him a pair of shoes. By the time he returned to Swannington in 1922 he was making shoes for the whole family, and for some Swannington residents. When grandson John arrived Arthur made his shoes, and continued to do so until John left school!

Arthur had served in the First World War, and, again, showing his aptitude for a wide variety of skills, taught himself haircutting, charging 6d (21/2p) a time, and sending the money home to May. John remembers him as being chatty, but, in common with most of his generation, not going into details about his war experience, apart from fighting in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Baku in Azerbaijan. However, he did talk of his being wounded while filling sandbags. The resultant back injury caused him to suffer lumbago (lower back pain) for the rest of his life. He also recalled his convalescence in Ireland, where nettle soup was on the menu. Interestingly he habitually carried a dried up potato in his back pocket, a folk remedy for back pain.

During the Second World War Arthur was an ARP warden. The picture shows him in his home made bomb shelter. Many of us have pet graveyards in our gardens and Arthur was no exception. After the war he used the large bomb shelter excavation as the last resting place of Peggy the pony and an old car chassis.

His ARP stirrup pump gave sterling service in the greenhouse for spraying plants and his upturned ARP helmet, drilled with drain holes, became a hanging basket. John remembers that the basket still bore the letters ARP! His ARP greatcoat was dyed blue and gave faithful service for many years after the war.



Looking for the Enemy!

Arthur and May set up the village post office and shop in one of what was then two cottages. This they ran until 1948, when the post office moved to Miss Lily Parker in Ugate.

Arthur and May's sons, Leonard and Arthur (Eddie) were both apprenticed to Mann Egerton, motor engineers, in Norwich.

More of John's reminiscences next month, when Arthur uses his ingenuity to build a bullock shed and garage, and Leonard meets his wife to be, Hilda Medler, of Church Farm, Attlebridge.