

Down Memory Lane - John Watts part 2 *(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, since 1902. These are more of John Watts's memories and stories of his family.

Last month we were introduced to John's grandfather Arthur, who was ever a man of great skill and resourcefulness. As his sons grew up and went to work as motor mechanic apprentices at Mann Egerton in Norwich, Arthur continued to support his family with his ingenious ideas and projects. Young Leonard cycled to work in Norwich each day. In due time he was keen to buy a motor bike for the journey. Arthur suggested they fatten a calf for market, Leonard adding the proceeds to his savings to purchase a motor bike. But first Arthur had to build the bullock shed. Using tree saplings and trunks he made a timber frame. Coarse clay from his field and broom fronds were raw material for the walls. The roof was thatched (by Arthur of course) with wheat straw.



With the motor cycle bought, Leonard progressed at Mann Egerton. His foreman observed him reversing cars in the garage and after asking Leonard to drive him round Norwich, pronounced him proficient to fetch a car chassis from the Longbridge works in Birmingham. Leonard went there by train, and drove the very basic chassis back, using an improvised wooden seat, with thick jacket and flying helmet for warmth.

He and his brother Eddie (Arthur), also an apprentice at Mann Egerton, would strip down old cars in their spare time, renovating them as a hobby. Their facility with engine and chassis renovation allowed them to enjoy holidays around Britain, driving as far as Devon and the Lake District.

Leonard's skills were to lead to one of the most important meetings of his life. He was called on to service the cars of the Medler family, then at Church Farm, Attlebridge. There he met the daughter of the house, Hilda. Hilda's mother was not over impressed with her daughter's choice, an impression which was roundly reversed in later years!

Leonard and Hilda were a thrifty young couple and decided to build their own house, on land owned by the Watts family in

Broad Lane. Long before Bernard Matthews had his light bulb moment Hilda was raising turkeys to sell. In the days before antibiotics this was a tricky venture, involving home remedies of nettles for treating disease in turkey chicks. Once married in 1938, Leonard gave his wife an allowance for housekeeping. In time Leonard appreciated that his wife was a shrewd manager of the accounts, which she took over, giving Leonard an allowance.

Eventually the dream house, Hyfields, was built. Many will remember its perfect example of a 1930s villa with extensive grounds. The picture shows the happy couple at the back of the house. Leonard and Hilda duly moved in, and, in 1947, baby John arrived.

John's story continues next month