

## Smithy Hill Works, Lindale

**Smithy Hill works** in Lindale was probably originally a small farm, with a house and barn. In the 1920s and 1930s **William Snape** (born in Lancaster and apprenticed as a blacksmith in Birmingham) used the two storey building as an **engineering workshop**. He must have been one of the first car owners in Lindale, having built a kit car, which he kept on the upper floor. William Snape died in 1934.

The upper floor, a well-proportioned room with wooden panelling and clothes hooks around the wall, was once used as Lindale's **village hall**. The room was also used by the Home Guard in the war. After the war, when Gerald Whiteway, the undertaker, took over the works, he remembered that wooden spears, of an African type, and guns made in wood were hanging from the hooks. These were what the Home Guard men must have trained with. At this time, the works was an **undertakers** and they used to make coffins as well. There was a butchers shop next door at *Smithydale*.

When Bill Lowrie started at **Whiteways Joinery Works** in 1962 there were 11 joiners working there, and just a bit later John Haines started work there. Gerald Whiteway was the boss, though he was the undertaker, and worked adjacent. After 1951 he lived at *Hillbrook* on lower Lindale Hill. Walter Atkinson was the main 'shop joiner'. He worked on the benches and made coffins. He rarely did outside jobs. He lived at *Hillside* on Lindale Hill. His wife, Mrs Atkinson, had a sweet shop there, called *Holly House*. Her son, David Atkinson worked for Clifford Whiteway, who ran Lindale Post Office. Previously Gerald and Walter used to work for John Knowles' father in his corrugated joinery works near the Monument on Grange Road. There was also Sam Burton, Tom Henderson, Jim Hayes, John Matteson, John Drinkall, Harry Parker, Gerald Dawson, Peter Thompson and Leonard Simpson. Most of them lived in the village. The latter two left later in 1962. Brian Fitzsimmons had just left. He had a bad accident, and cut his wrist on a piece of glass. He then started as an insurance man. His parents had run Lindale's Top House. John Drinkall, Jed Dawson and John Matteson left later.

They were **agricultural joiners**, building Dutch barns from old telegraph poles, making cartwheels and wooden rakes and mending hay carts. The Farmers' Guardian made an illustrated article about Walter Atkinson, the head joiner, making 'the last wooden wheelbarrow in the area'. All the work was by hand, there were no power tools at that time. The works were all flat belt driven by a 10 horse power motor, which might nowadays be considered a Health and Safety nightmare. They did lots of big jobs, for pubs and breweries, refitting hotels in Kendal and Ulverston, repairing houses for the Council, and school repairs in the summer. The joiners would sit around the fire in the works during their lunch break, and try out Cumberland and Westmorland wrestling holds. They were all immensely strong and great characters. They were good times and they had a laugh. There was plenty of work. The traffic on Lindale Hill was so bad they could wait for 20 minutes trying to cross the road

to buy some lunch from the Co-op opposite. The works used to shake when lorries went past on the hill, and vibration from the by-pass construction in 1976-7 was horrendous.

Bill Lowrie was considered an outsider when he started at Smithy Hill works, as he came from Cartmel. He was terrified when he came. It was said 'you've got to fight to get into Lindale'. Lindale was a working village with a frightening reputation in the 1960s. There were a lot of scuffles, especially outside the Lindale Inn, whose door opened directly into the road in those days. One day a brick came through the window.

An early photo from high on The Lots above Smithy Hill Works showed only Owl Nook, Sunny Bank Farm and one cottage on the Back o' the Fell Road. High Pines adjacent was originally a damson orchard. Gerald Whiteway bought it and built a house there.

### **Some jobs**

When Bill first started at Gerald Whiteway's, one of his jobs was to **burn the shavings**, from the hand planes. There were lots of shavings. One day the fire got out of control and set fire to some wooden telegraph poles that had been bought and stacked in the yard. They had to call the fire brigade from Grange.

When Bill had been there two days, a **coffin** came in, and Walter said '*You'll have to get in to try this for size*'. When there was a funeral John and Bill used to collect ivy to dress the side of the grave. They collected it from walls on the *Back o' the Fell Road*. Bill's first weekly pay packet was £3.00. He had turned down a job on a farm in Cartmel, for £7.00 a week, as he wanted to learn a trade.

Right from the start Bill and John had to stand on their own two feet. They each saw through their jobs from start to finish. It was good grounding. They learned from so many different joiners. There was a gradual change over time from repairing barns, to tackling quite big jobs like refitting pubs.

At first there was only one **handcart** to transport tools to a job. They all wore hobnailed boots with studs. One day they pushed the handcart up *School Hill*, but on returning, with Bill in the shafts at the front, the cart ran away down the hill, with the others just left laughing. If someone already had the cart, you had to carry your tools across the handlebars of your bike. When the handcart gave up in 1966 no one was sorry.

They had three vehicles, an Austin pick up, a Ford Prefect van, and a Bedford van, which Tom Henderson drove all the while. He wouldn't let anyone near that. It was nearly an hour's travel up to Hawkshead for example, they then worked till five o'clock, and came back in their own time, and then worked in the evening to get ready for the next day's work. The monthly petrol bill was never above £5.00 at Edgcombe's Garage on Lindale Hill. Bill used to pay 2 shillings for a gallon of petrol and sixpence for a shot of oil for his motorbike.

They did school jobs in the summer, Crosthwaite School, Sandside School, Victoria School, Ulverston, polishing floors and repairs. One of the jobs to be done by Bill and John was fitting the offices when Oxleys factory was built in Ulverston. They did a lot of work with John Thompson of Cark. They refitted the Cock and Dolphin in Kendal, Tarn Hows Hotel and Lakeside Hotel.

It was in 1968 that John and Bill, then in their 20s, became self-employed, and in 1975 they took over from Gerald Whiteway as **Haines and Lowrie**, and paid £40 a week in rent for the works. They kept two lads on, Basil Turner and Kenny Hopper, and took on another two, Michael Clarke, (who lives up the village and left later to go to Glaxo) and Alan Laisby from Grange. Kenny was busy with his drumming, so he only worked part time.

They did a lot of jobs for Bob Retallick, making windows, doors and casings, stairs and roofs, for a great many conversions of houses into retirement homes, Abbotsford House, Kent's Bank, Old Vicarage, Allithwaite, the Old Grammar School, Cartmel, Colton House, Satterthwaite, and for new housing estates at Troutbeck and Natland. They later did general Council repair work for the rural areas of SLDC, from Kirkby-in-Furness to Sedbergh. They converted a farm and outbuildings at Blawith, reglazed the Town Clocks at Ulverston and Grange, made doors for the Council Chamber at Windermere, reroofed chalets at Water Yeat. Other work involved new windows for Youdell's art shop in Kendal, windows for North Lodge Castle Head, a large door at Buck Crag, and new roofs at Grange. One of their most recent, and interesting, jobs was the new hexagonal house on Grange Esplanade.



In February 2014, Lindale joiners **John Haines and Bill Lowrie** retired from Smithy Hill Works after 50 years of service. Smithy Hill Works continues to be a bespoke joinery business, now taken over by Ian Lockyer, who has moved to live and work in Lindale.

*Based on an interview with John Haines and Bill Lowrie on their last working day by Sylvia Woodhead, February 2014*