

Brief biography of Lindale resident William Snape (1870 - 1934)

William Snape was born in Lancaster in 1870: he was the second of eight siblings (four boys and four girls). The family lived at 17 Marton Street, Lancaster. His father was a brushmaker. His youngest sister, Minnie, was my paternal grandmother, making him my great uncle.

In the late 1880s he moved to the Aston area of Birmingham where he started work as a blacksmith's apprentice. He lodged with an uncle, George Brown (his mother's brother) and his family. The availability of accommodation with a relative may have been one of the deciding factors for moving to Birmingham.

After his marriage in 1895 to Alice Howson from Wray in Lancashire, he and his wife continued to live in Birmingham. The circumstances of their meeting are not known. For whatever reason they had no children. William made steady progress in his career: census returns for 1891, 1901 and 1911 show his occupation as "blacksmith's striker" and then "blacksmith". A story passed down through the Snape family mentions William being presented to George V during one of the King's visits to Birmingham, either during WWI or in the 1920s. By that stage William was described as the Chief Engineer at the Imperial Metal Works. I recall seeing a photograph in the 1970s hung in the home of his late niece (the daughter of his eldest sister), showing William meeting the King.

At some stage in the 1920s he bought the white-coloured house on Lindale Hill now called Hillbrook, and its outbuildings: at the time the house was called Dunkirk (well before that French port became famous in WWII). The house was renamed Hillbrook after it was bought in the early 1950s by Gerald Whiteway, following the death of William's widow, Alice, in 1951. The reason for their choice of Lindale as a home is a pleasant mystery.

Even away from work William enjoyed using his blacksmith and engineering skills: he strengthened the two storey building (now occupied by Ian Lockyer Joinery in Smithy Hill) for use as a workshop, evidenced by the still-visible metal-framed box of vertical and horizontal girders, and the ground socket for a davit, topped with a brass metal cap, engraved "W. Snape 1925". In the late 1920s William drove a car, which he had made from a kit, to Birmingham with the niece mentioned above as passenger. He garaged the vehicle on the strengthened first floor of the workshop, accessed from Smithy Hill through a set of barn doors (now a sliding door).

The dates of William Snape's retirement, and his and Alice's permanent move to Lindale are not known. My late father, John Lawrence (born near Preston in 1920) spent many enjoyable childhood summer holidays staying with his "Uncle Bill" in Lindale, until William's death in 1934 at the age of 64. He was interred in Lancaster Cemetery. Alice continued to live in the house until her own death in 1951. She, too, was buried in Lancaster cemetery, in the same grave as her husband.

In the early 1980s my own father chose Grange-over-Sands as his own retirement destination, following a career as an accountant, on the basis of the benign micro-climate he had noticed in the area during his childhood visits to Lindale. "Uncle Bill's" legacy lived on through my father: he acquired many of his own technical and metal work skills from his uncle, which were a factor in him applying to join the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) as a founder member during his military service in WWII. They also gave him great enjoyment in later life when completing his own DIY projects in family homes in West Yorkshire and in the bungalow he occupied in Grange-over-Sands until death in 1990.

Mark Lawrence

(William Snape's Great Nephew)

Postscript William Snape is listed in Grange Red Books, for 1929-34, as W. Snape, Dunkirk. His wife Alice, is listed as A. Snape at Dunkirk House from 1936-49. (I have not checked pre 1929 or 1950-2) Sylvia Woodhead