

John Tew, Gardener

A couple of years ago, Linda Grant came to Leamington from Lincolnshire on a visit. She called in at South Lodge, Jephson Gardens to see the display of the garden's history, and recounted a little of her family's history. Her mother, grandmother and grandfather lived in Taylor Avenue before and during WW2, then moved to Thomas Street in the 1950s.



Back at home in Lincolnshire, Linda unearthed some family photos which she scanned and sent to me. One in particular caught my eye - of her grandfather and three younger siblings taken on Cubbington Road in about 1905. Linda thought the view was of Pound Lane, but I was able to tell her

that the photo was taken opposite the end of Elm Road, looking up towards the Crown Way junction. Apart from minor alterations to frontages, the view has hardly changed!

John Tew married Elizabeth Alford Bell from Devon at Offchurch in 1895, where they set up home and had two children, Amy Clare and Dorothy Annetta, who were baptised at the church there in February 1896 and October 1897. By the time Sidney John was born in 1899, the family had moved to Leamington: he was baptised at St Paul's in Leicester Street in March 1899, and in the 1901 census, John and Elizabeth are shown living with their three children on Cubbington Road. The 1911 census, noted that the Tews had been married 16 years, and had had 7 children of whom 6 were still alive. Their children still at home were Dorothy Annetta (13), Sidney John (12), William Thomas (9), George Henry (7) and Arthur James (3).

Looking more closely at the photo, I think that the child on the left of the cart is probably William Thomas Tew, aged about three, and not a girl, as Linda originally thought. He is wearing girls' clothes - many small boys did in Victorian and Edwardian times, and not just in families who passed on siblings' clothes because they found it hard to make ends meet: dressing small boys in girls' clothes made toileting very much easier, for one thing. I assume that the girls are Dorothy Annetta and Amy Clare. Sidney John is holding on to the donkey's bridle.

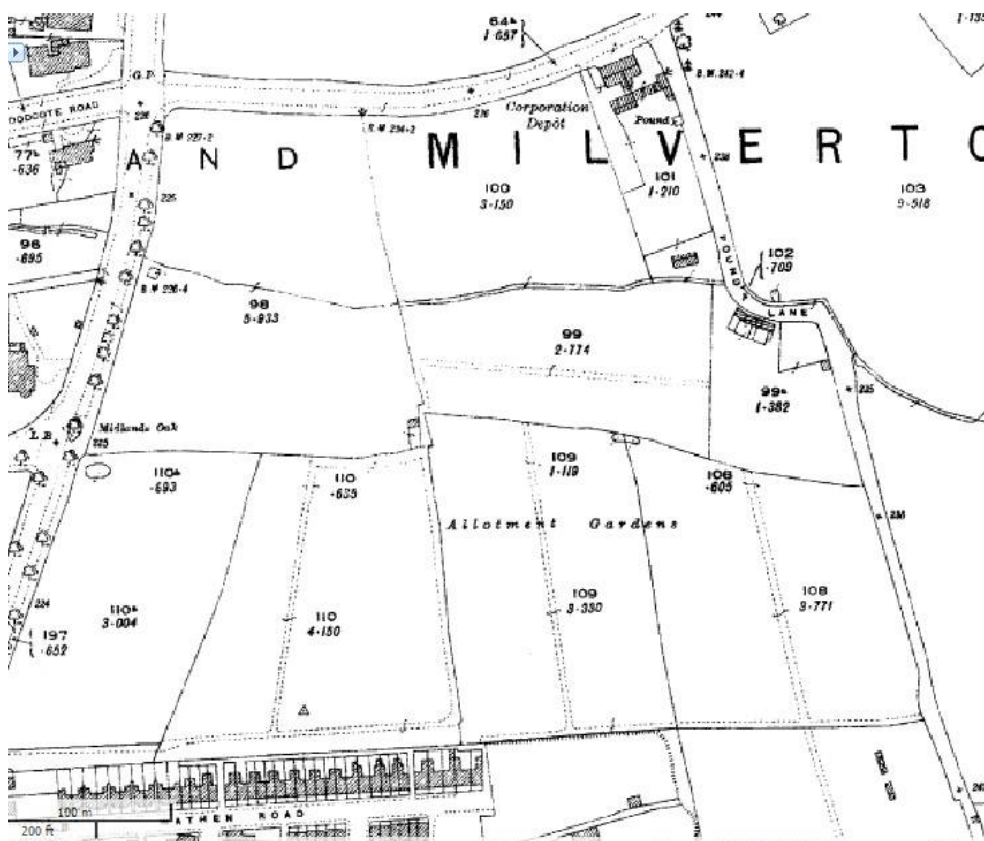


Linda's ancestors, the Tew family, were living in the house directly behind the photo, which was then numbered 19 Cubbington Road. By 1933, following building development northwards along the road from Midlands Oak park, it had been renumbered as 94 Cubbington Road. The gate behind the children led across farm fields. When Lillington school expanded in the 1950s, the gateway became the school drive, allowing vehicular access for the delivery of coke for the school boilers and school dinners from Central Kitchens. The long thin garden behind the house which once had a small laundry, now has houses built on it.

Although the signboard on the cart reads 'John Tew Fishmonger', John Tew, Linda's great grandfather, and father of the children in the photo, was first and foremost a gardener and a beekeeper. He started his career at 'the big house' in Whittlebury, Northamptonshire the village where he was born. In his early twenties, John Tew became a gardener at Combe Abbey, Coventry. He later gardened for Mrs Bland, of The Firs, Newbold Terrace, and according to the Leamington Courier, 12 August 1899, won prizes in the 'Gentleman's Gardeners & Nurserymen' category of the Leamington and District Flower Show, for his table plants, begonias, gloxinias, and honey.

John Tew appeared in the Leamington Courier on a further occasion, in May 1912, when the paper reported at length on a contentious issue involving working men in Lillington who were anxious to acquire land suitable for allotments.

In 1910, the men had approached the Vicar for use of glebe land, but he turned them down. Sir Francis Waller, the other major local landowner, then offered land which was unworkable, and John Tew, as a professional gardener who had lived in Lillington for twelve years, was summoned to give evidence to an enquiry at the Town Hall. He stated that the principal objection to Plot No 1 was the abominable approach to it. Plot No 2 - "Duffer's Close" - was a bog in wet weather, and No 3 -



"Starveall" - would set as hard as bricks in dry weather. He stated that he "would not have it as a gift for allotments". He added that the neglect of the ditches had contributed to the bad state of the road leading to No. 1 plot. The enquiry closed with the decision to make a site visit. In spite of numerous objections from local politicians and others, by January 1913, the site had been pegged out by the Borough Engineer, to provide 56 plots [probably the two fields off Pound Lane, now covered by Loxley Way; map courtesy of Warwickshire County Council, <http://maps.warwickshire.gov.uk/historical/>].