

THE ALDRIDGE FAMILY OF BENSON

John Aldridge wrote many fascinating articles looking back at life in the village he loved during the twentieth century. In these articles, published in the Benson Bulletin, he shared his extensive knowledge of Benson's old buildings and their inhabitants.

His family had lived in the village since 1861, when his great grandfather, William Aldridge married Mercy Chamberlain in Ewelme Parish Church. Sadly Mercy died in 1870, after producing at least two sons. She was buried in St Helen's Parish Church.

William and Mercy's eldest son, William, was born in a cottage in Brook Street in 1862 and by the census of 1881, he was an apprentice shoemaker, living in Warborough, near Benson. He married Sarah Ann Clinch and they had four sons. William and Sarah lived in Wisteria Cottage (now Plough Cottage) in Crown Square and for the first three decades of the 20th century, they ran a shop next door on the corner of Old London Road. They sold drapery, boots and shoes. William also acted as a part-time village postman and ran a saddlery business next door to the Post Office.



William and Sarah outside their cottage and captured in Brook Street.

Two of their sons, William and Henry, became builders and decorators and worked to preserve many of the old properties in the village. William's sons, John and Peter, carried on the family tradition and restored many old houses and shops.

According to a trade directory of 1924, William and Henry Aldridge were “carpenters, cabinet makers, painters, wheelwrights, furniture removers and motor proprietors of Crown Square.” Sarah Aldridge was a draper in Crown Square.

The youngest son, Gerald was born in 1899. He served in the 4th West Surrey Regiment in the Great War and was a prisoner of war in 1918. However, he survived and bought Chiltern Lodge (now Kingsford House) in 1959.

Sarah (or Granny Aldridge) owned a plot of land in Crown Lane, which she used to build a Gospel Mission Hall. She lived until 1957.

The Aldridge family donated the triangle of land, which they owned at the junction of Crown Lane and Watlington Road, to the village. It is now a well maintained green space with a small plaque recording the generosity of this family.



William Aldridge on tricycle

Peter Clarke writes

William Aldridge is riding his tricycle. He was known to everyone as “Steppie” because of his club foot. We guess in a busier age it wouldn’t be long before the chap opposite had his wheelbarrow sent for six on the busy corner! Indeed the photo is amazing. Not a 4-wheeler in sight, on what is now one of the busiest bottlenecks in Benson. Behind Steppie is a clear view of Birmingham Yard, devoid of the modern row of houses which today is Castle Close. The White Hart display board stands where the path today leads down to our Library. In those days it was a kitchen garden for the White Hart Hotel.



Sarah Aldridge with her grandchildren, John and Peter in the doorway of her shop in Crown Square, which (we think) sold boots and shoes, as well as drapery goods.



*Granny (Sarah) Aldridge with her team of Sunday School teachers
(photographed before 1957)*



Peter Clarke writes about the garage now known as no. 1 Brook Street

This is the one picture we have of the garage, bought by Peter Aldridge in about 1947, looking a little worse for wear, taken perhaps just before it finally closed. Note however the easily visible cruck beams appearing from behind the cracking plaster.