

## THE DINES FAMILY (George, William Henry, Lewis and John)

In the archives of the Meteorological Office will be found many references to the Dines Family, three generations of meteorologists, who contributed much to the advancement of British meteorology from the 1870's to the 1940's, and much of that work was done in Benson. About 1914, W.H. Dines purchased a property where Observatory Close now stands. He renamed his new home, Observatory House and lived there until 1939.

**George Dines (1812-1887)** was a successful, wealthy builder, a keen student of physics and a Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society. His son **William Henry**, born in 1855, soon became interested and involved in his father's hobby. Following the Tay Bridge disaster of 1879, a wind force committee was set up by the Society and Dines junior became its most active member. By the turn of the century, his investigation into winds in the upper air started to receive formal public funding. His work, involving the use of kites, started in Oxshott in Watlington. One of the big features of this first decade was Scott's expedition to the Antarctic - Dines' meteographs and pressure tube anemograph were used by that team in their researches. In 1914, he moved to Benson and occupied Colne House which was built on the site of the present Observatory Close. Meanwhile, sons **Lewis** (1883-1965) and **John** (1886- 1980) both followed in their father's and grandfather's footsteps.

The Meteorological Office laid great store by the contribution from the Benson Observatory. It was expected not only to specialise in upper air problems, but also meteorological applications to agriculture. The most recent member of the "clan" was **John Dines** who died aged 94 in 1980. He had been a Fellow of the Meteorological Society for 72 years. When the Met Office moved to their current premises in Bracknell in 1961, one of the wings of that new building was named after the family. When Mr.W.H.Dines died in 1927, his effects were auctioned and one of the two wooden buildings clad in corrugated iron was sold to Mr. Bert Briggs, who lived in Mrs. Bloomfield's present house. The building is apparently still there.

*(The writer of this article, Peter Clarke is grateful to notes received from Mr. Bob Ebdon, formerly of the Bracknell Met Office, and anecdotal information from Mr. John Aldridge. Thanks also to Mr. Steve Poole. Great-grandson of W. H. Dines).*

**Mr W H Dines**, who lived at the Old Observatory, Brook Street, Benson, from 1914 until his death in 1927 was a distinguished meteorologist. Being of independent means, after taking a mathematical degree at Cambridge, he was able to devote most of his life to the pursuit of his hobby, meteorology. He became well known early in his career from his invention of the Pressure Tube Anemometer which was adopted as the standard instrument for measuring the wind in this country and was used also in many places abroad. Later he became even better known for his exploration of the upper air, first by means of instruments carried by kites and later by small balloons which reached a height of ten or twelve miles before bursting and allowing the instrument to return to earth.

He pursued this work at his home near Watlington and later during his residence at Benson. In recognition of his work he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1905, an honour much coveted by British scientists. He was also a Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society and served on its council for many years, being elected President for two terms of office. His reputation was international. He was of a retiring nature and though well known in London scientific circles he did not take much part in village life or local affairs.