

# 'Lewis George Wyse'

by Cynthia Garlick

To the people and visitors to the Bassetlaw Museum, L.G. Wyse is simply a benefactor of the Museum and a onetime Cycle Retailer on Bridgegate but to me he was uncle Lewis and I loved him dearly. In fact, he was actually my great, great, uncle, my grandfather's uncle.

Lewis George Wyse was born 23-1-1867 and was the youngest child of Lewis Wyse and Charlotte nee Nettleship. My Grandfather Lewis Edward White was born 6-10-1870 and was the eldest son of their eldest daughter Emma Wyse born in 1849. Uncle and nephew were three years apart in age and brought up more like brothers than uncle and nephew...

As I remember them, they were like as two peas in a pod with many interests in common. They loved horse racing and both were talented musicians. Each autumn Lewis Edward always returned to Retford for the Doncaster races and Lewis George would go to Manchester for the November Handicap. I was told that they used to do the journey on their penny-farthing bicycles. I know that at one time they were both messengers for the Yeomanry... mounted on their penny-farthings...

The first visit to Retford that I can remember was in the autumn of 1934 when my father bought a Ford Eight motorcar and our first outing was to take my grandparents to visit Lewis and his wife Jenny. I distinctly recall sitting between my mother and grandmother in the back seat. My grandfather always said that when he saw the red tiled roof of the building just before Babworth Lake he felt he was nearly home... Both my maternal grandparents died in 1940 but my parents and I continued to visit Jenny and Lewis for the rest of their lives.

Their home next to and behind the shop was a treasure trove of fascinating objects and there was always something new to amuse me. Bound volumes of 'Picture Magazine' that uncle had found and a small arm chair for me to sit in while I read them. An old type writer, a doll complete with its bed, a fleet of boats in an old bath, a whole box full of small 'Cupie dolls' to live in my dolls house. It is any wonder that I loved him? He never could get his head round my given name, Cynthia, so always called 'little lass', even after I grew to be 5 foot 8 inches tall!

Aunty Jenny was a diabetic and this affected her sight. I always had to stand in the doorway between the living room and the kitchen so that the light was behind me so she could assess how much I had grown. At the back of the shop and house was Jenny's

walled garden. With the exception of roses, which she grew for their scent, all flowers in it were blue. I don't know for sure but perhaps she could see blue better than other colours as a side effect of her illness. Also in the garden attached to the back of the drawing room was her aviary where she reared budgerigars. She used to scatter seed over the old hat she always wore outdoors and the birds would gather on it. Her 'Paris model', she would say.

Uncle Lewis once bought a statue of a lady for her garden and she didn't like it so he put it in the toilet at the bottom of the yard. I was frightened of it for some reason, but the next time we went he had painted her green and I didn't mind her anymore.

Uncle had his garden over near the cricked ground... [There were] large fruit trees and rows and rows and vegetables and soft fruit bushes. Up the rise at the top was a summerhouse and slung between two large pear trees a hammock. In front of the summerhouse was a lawn and in the summer we would have afternoon tea there, boiling the kettle on a Primus stove and eating the goodies we had carried across in a large hamper.

Sometimes uncle would boil eggs for us, as he kept hens in a fantastic hen house, which was a wooden model of a house. He had bought it at some auction

sale he had gone to and then hadn't known what to do with it. Water came from a pump and once it had been primed by pouring water down it from the tank it went into, I was able to pump away and fill all the tanks up so uncle could water his garden. What a delight for a child who only knew water from a tap...

When petrol was rationed we rode bicycles at home so that we could still go to see them. There was only a relatively short period when this was impossible. Uncle never wrote and Aunty couldn't see to write but one Christmas a large box arrived in the post addressed to the 'the Lass' and when we opened it, it contained a small tea-set in white and gold Mason's Iron stone pottery. There was no letter or explanation but we were just able to make out Retford on the postmark.

On Saturday morning Uncle always went to the auction held in the Market Square. We never saw him make a bid that we were aware of but all manner of things used to be knocked down to Mr. Wyse, Bridgegate. My father was an electrical and mechanical engineer and quite often after the auction he would be presented with something that uncle expected him to repair. Dad saw this as a challenge and usually succeeded only to be presented with it at a later date as a gift. I still have the pair of binoculars that he gave my father... after

he had repaired them of course.

Over the shop was a sign which read 'The Great North Road Cycle Shop. Established 30 years'. I once commented on this to my father and he told me he had been taking my mother to see her aunt and uncle since 1920 and the sign was up then. Not only did uncle sell bicycles and mend them but he sold gramophones and records and paraffin and at one time it was the only place where it was possible to buy petrol for motor cars.

All his life Lewis bough antiques and the house was so full of old furniture and china and glassware that there was not an inch of wall or cupboard space to spare. The saddest thing to think is that he died virtually penniless in a house full of valuable things, which he couldn't sell because he had made a pact with his friend Mr Pedley (Pegler), the owner of Amcott House that he would leave his antiques to the town if he would leave his house, so that Retford could have a museum. He had given his business to a Dick Redfearn who from being a boy hung around the workshop and later helped him...

During the war years I remember there was some trouble with an officious air raid warden that claimed that Lewis was a German spy and was showing a light to show enemy planes were to bomb, Retford being

surrounded by airfields. The case went to the Assizes and was thrown out as rubbish.

In fact, uncle Lewis insisted that his father was Danish. The census returns have him as Prussian but from what I remember being discussed and research I have done since, I think that his father must have been in the Danish half of Schleswig-Holstein, which was ceded to Prussia in 1866. After WWI the inhabitants of the state were allowed to vote for the country to which they wished to belong. Schleswig voted to go back to Denmark.

Nobody could have been more patriotic than my aunt and uncle. Every Sunday Jenny would bake a vast quantity of sausage rolls and take them to the railway station in the evening where she knew the troop train would stop for a short while. I remember my mother and I going with her handing up the rolls in their baskets for the soldiers to take. Who funded this I have no idea but considering Jenny's sight problems it was no mean task.

Aunty Jenny died when I was 18 and about to go away to College but my parents visited uncle Lewis and nearly every weekend and we would stay for longer periods during my vacations. There was always a bicycle kept ready for me to ride and thus I was able to explore the area.

One task I undertook at this time was to try to restore Jenny's very neglected garden. Brambles had taken over and the roses were in need of severe pruning. I was very intrigued to find a number of tiny green bottles as I turned over the soil. I lined them up on the kitchen windowsill and when uncle saw them and he chuckled and told me that at one time he had a tame magpie called Jack, which used to steal Jenny's insulin bottles and it was his cache that I had found.

One Christmas mother and I found a score of the Mikado in the piano stool and we started to play the overture, which was in duet form, on the piano. Uncle commented that it sounded so dreadful! He walked off but came back shortly afterwards with a set of tools and to my amazement set about tuning the piano. I remember commenting that it wouldn't make much difference as I was no pianist but a singer, where upon he produced a pile of sheet music for me to sing.

He also gave me Jenny's copy of the Messiah, which I used for many years. In it was a program for a performance of Messiah at Grove Street Methodist Church where Jenny had been in the choir.

These are just some of a wealth of happy memories I have of my Retford Family.

I returned to Retford a couple of times after my

marriage but enquiries regarding the museum came to nothing until in 1997 when I discovered in our Nicholson Canal Guide that the Bassetlaw Museum was listed as an attraction in Retford. That summer my husband and I ventured up the Chesterfield Canal as far as Retford in our narrow boat, as part of our voyage round the northern canal system and I was able to see some of the items I had grown up with on display in the museum. ..

After my visit I resolved to find out more about my family and as we journeyed home via Nottingham I visited the County Archives and so began my interest in family history. My latest discovery is that I have a third cousin living in New Zealand... What a wonderful thing the internet is!

I have been able to send her photographs of 'the doll's house' which she remembered seeing on her only visit as a small child to see 'Uncle Lewis' and which I inherited from Lewis George. The 'house' consists of one room, a drawing room and was made by his father Lewis Wyse (Weis) who came to this country as a young man in his twenties between 1841 and 1851.

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The doll's house made by the father of Lewis G. Wyse.



