

Birmingham Medal Society - Thursday 1st June 2023. Meeting notes.

President Paul Handford thanked this evening's speaker, member Martin Harrison for standing in at short notice due to a cancellation. He invited Martin to give his presentation titled **Friends of the Family**

Martin explained he had given this talk once before during lockdown via zoom. He was interested to see how it would translate to a real-life audience. He also explained it was a very Leamington Spa specific talk, his home town.

Martin explained that this talk demonstrates the importance of research – even the common medals all have tale to tell and are earned by an individual person person. It is important to research even the small groups and to quote the late John Tamplin, once again 'Research never ends'..

This evening's talk is not about the individuals however, but the research involved.

Martin said he loves social history, the lockdowns of 2020 gave him an opportunity to visit many places in Leamington Spa he'd never been to before. This research was actually quite straightforward but made complex by knowing the person who the medals had come from and a throw away comment made at time.

In 1977 Martin, aged 16, knew a couple from the local RAF Association, Fritz and **Toots** ALLEN – Fritz being an RAF veteran and both of them being in their 70s at time. He was summoned to their house one evening and it was Toots who wanted to see him and after a preamble gave him:

- 1914-18 BWM and VM Cpl H Maxwell RE
- Single VM Pte D H Maxwell MGC.

At time Martin asked whose they were and remembered Toots saying, when she parted with the medals that they had belonged to **'Friends of the Family'**. Martin assumed the at the time the Maxwells were brothers.



Henry Maxwell (left) David Maxwell (right) 14-15 Star and BWM to David are replacements as originals missing.

Despite the occasional temptation to part with the medals, Martin didn't as they had been a gift. In 2010 a search of Ancestry UK revealed the first names of both men – Henry and David Henry, David being Henry's son and that they had lived in Leamington Spa. Several pages of Henry's service records had also survived enabling a reasonable biography to be completed.

Sadly, the MICs revealed Henry was missing 1914-15 Star and David a 1914-18 British War Medal. Blank medals were added to each to restore them to full entitlement.

Copy death cert obtained confirmed exact dates of death and that Henry died in Warwick Hospital, David in Warneford hospital in Leamington Spa. (latter no longer exists)

Ordinarily this would be the end of research as no further detail available. However, it was noticed in Henry's World War 1 records that on his attestation papers from August 1915, the witness signing the form was a F or Y Allen. This being the same surname as Toots and her husband.

Both Fritz and Toots were born in 1905, so too young to be a witness in 1914. A coincidence or maybe a family link? Too tempting to overlook, especially bearing in mind Toot's comments about '*Friends of the Family*' and curiosity took hold as to exactly what the link was between the Allens and Maxwells; thus some confusing but interesting twists and turns took place and many hours poring over census records on ancestry.com and at The National Archives in London – before they all readily became available online.

The following was initially established to help unravel: starting with the one known fact Fritz Allen.

- Fritz Levett Allen married Florence Lillian **Toone** (Toots) between Jul-Sep 1939 both aged 34 and had no children.

An initial link now established – that of Toone as this was Henry's wife's maiden name and it seemed likely that Henry had married one of Toot's relatives.

- 1886, Henry Maxwell married Sarah Jane Toone born 1865 in Long Itchington (40 years old when Toots was born). Toot's first name Florence also name of Henry & Sarah's daughter. Initially thought this her. But no!

So the research emphasis moved to **Sarah Jane Toone's** family to see where Florence (Toots) fitted in.

- 1871 census Sarah Jane's (aged 6) living with parents and 3 brothers in Long Itchington.
- 1881 Sarah (16) and family shown living at 11 Chesham Street, Leamington with
- 1886 - Sarah Jane has married Henry Maxwell and 1891 census shows them living in Birmingham.

As an interesting aside -

Sarah Jane had brother named Daniel. In 1901 he was married to Annie and living at 45 Court Street, Leamington as Gas Works Labourer. Leamington Gas works, Ranelagh Terrace – there was a reason for mentioning this .

- 1901 census Henry and Sarah Jane living at 21 Rushmore Place Leamington – now demolished children's play area but can see outlines of old houses.

That was really the end of home research in 2010 and still did not explain Allen on Henry's attestation papers! Only conclusion maybe was Y Allen one of Fritz's parents and knew Maxwell's so when Toots said to me '*Friends of the Family*' may have meant Allen's and Toone's, living near each other and Fritz & Toots known each other since childhood?

Hr had still had not yet confirmed exactly where Toots fitted in with the Maxwell family!

In July 2011 a visit to TNA and 1911 census checked

- Toots, born in 1905 appeared on the 1911 census (aged 5) and living at 12 Duke Street, Leamington Spa. Living with Toots were Amelia Wilson, Grandmother aged 73. Edgar Horace Reeve Toone, Father aged 27. Amelia Jane Toone, Mother aged 30. Norah Winifred Toone, Sister aged 2.

Having established Edgar, Toot's father the emphasis now switched to him to see where the Toone link lay as still there was no clue as to his background. Able to work backwards.

- Edgar Horace Reeve Toone born between January and March 1884
- 1891 census , aged 7 living at 11 Chesham Street with family - parents as John & Mary aged in their 50s.

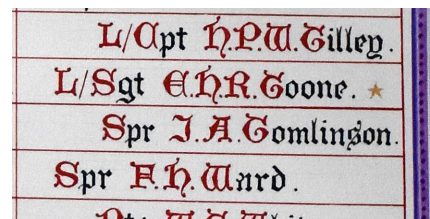
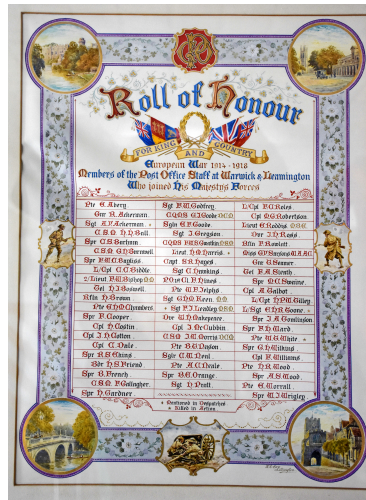
Remember - Sarah Jane's (married to Henry Maxwell) family on 1881 census living at 11 Chesham Street! The plot thickened – but a link between Maxwell and Toots was made.

- 1901 census aged 17 at same address, a Postman but now listed as John & Marys Grandson!
- On 1911 census as explained living at 12 Duke Street, with wife and daughters – Toots and Norah. Shown as Town Postman.

Frustratingly still no definitive link between Maxwell and Toone – the ‘Friends of family’, compounded by fact 1891 census Edgar is listed as Horace and following cross referencing with Sarah Jane Toone’s details he is living with his Grandparents.

A search was made for Edgar Toone’s MIC to see if he was entitled to medals - as aged only 30 at outbreak of WWI and - as often happens with research, suddenly all fell into place.

Edgar Toone had enlisted into the 8th Battalion Post Office Rifles and served in WWI – entitled to BWM and VM . He had sadly been KiA in January 1917. CWG site visited for certificate casualty details stated **Son of Sarah Jane Maxwell**, husband of Amelia Jane Toone.



Edgar Horace Reeve Toone’s headstone at Lijssenthoek CWG Cemetery and Leamington Post Office Roll of Honour

The link was made - Edgar was the illegitimate son of Sarah Jane Toone, she was 19 when she gave birth to him and this was two years before marrying Henry Maxwell in 1886.

In 1884 this would have been a serious taboo and it seems that Edgar lived with Sarah Jane’s parents and possibly to avoid embarrassment listed as their son and used his second name.

To summarise, the link between Toots Allen and Henry and David Maxwell is as follows

- Sarah Jane Toone had an illegitimate child – Edgar Horace Reeve Toone B; 1894
- Sarah Jane Toone subsequently married Henry Maxwell 1896:and had a child David Henry Maxwell B:1888
- Edgar Horace Reeve Toone subsequently married Amelia Jane Toone and had child Florence Toone (Toots)
- So Henry Maxwell was Toot’s Step Grandfather, and David Maxwell her Step Uncle and Henry’s Son.

Even in 1978 would have been embarrassing for Toots to tell me her father illegitimate, so ‘*Friends of the Family*’ would seem an appropriate comment, and she could never have known of the later research that would go into finding out the actual facts for posterity.

How so very kind of Toots her to give away a family heirloom to a 16 year old medal collector! Wonder if she had some forethought they would be looked after and talked about 45 years later?

Martin still doesn’t know who Y Allen is – who started the entire research project is? Not Fritz’s parents must have been another link as yet undiscovered.

Edgar’s name appears on the Leamington Spa War Memorial and he is buried in Lijssenthoek – Ypres salient and on the Post Office Roll of Honour in the town.

In May 2015 e-mail received from Henry Maxwell's Great Great Grandson, John Lee Maxwell, who lives in Australia – David Henry's descendant. He provided much extra detail to fill in gaps. His Father, John Snr and David Henry Maxwell's Grandson, was still alive at the time of writing.

One thing mentioned in passing was David Henry, Toot's uncle (MGC) had a son Horace Edgar Maxwell, named after Edgar Horace Reeve Toone, his maternal step uncle. Mentioned he was killed in WWII.

Research on Horace revealed he had lived at 28 Queen Street in Leamington.



Horace Edgar Maxwell's Medals

Enquiries revealed that Horace served in REME during World War II and in 1941 sent to Malaya, subsequently defending Singapore. He was captured on 15 Feb 42 at fall of Singapore. Shipped to Thailand and worked on the Burma Railway. Horace died of Cholera on 14 Jun 1943 aged 23, he was cremated and his ashes buried and commemorated in the cemetery in Don Rak - Kanchanaburi.

Horace's Service Papers acquired from the MoD, thus allowing his biography to be pieced and his medals acquired.



Martin at Don Rak CWG Cemetery, Kanchanaburi, Thailand

Finally, Martin had discovered that Edgar Horace Reeve Toone and Horace Edgar Maxwell appear on the Royal Leamington Spa War Memorial on the same side and a few names apart, but for different wars. One wonders if the connection had ever been made? Martin found it very poignant that he has the medals to a man whose memorials he regularly visits on either side of the world.

So the link is made - we know who 'Friends of the Family' were.

The main driver was to establish the link and Toots may never have known about another distant relative sharing the same names as her Father? Although all the 'main players' have been researched and biographies produced, there are no photographs of any of them!

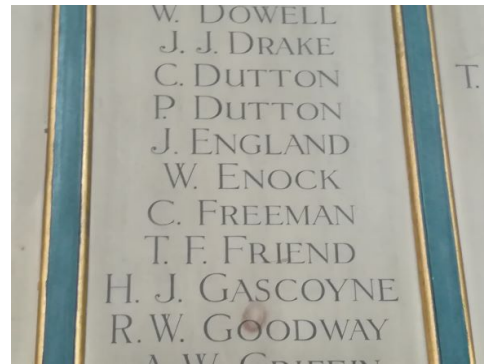
Back to the clock and gas works - clock bought for £35.00 broken from FB – engraved read inscription ***Presented to Caleb England by the staff and fellow workers at the Leamington Gas Works on his retirement 1892-34.***

Martin couldn't resist it – as Leamington's social history and nearly 100 years old.

Leamington had own gas works in Ranelagh Terrace.

Caleb had a son, Joseph England, following research it was established that he too had been killed on action serving with the 6th battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light infantry on 18th August 1916 at the battle of Delville Wood. Blown to pieces so no grave but commemorated on the Thiepval memorial.

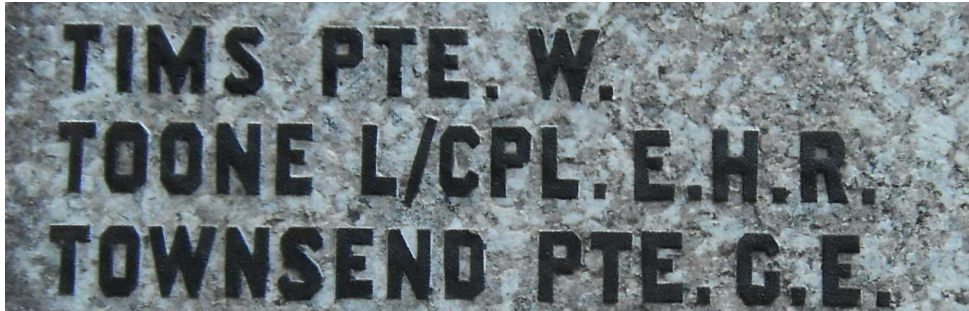
Joseph is also commemorated in St Pauls' Church, Tachbrook Road on plaque inside as well as in the Congregational Chapel in Spencer Street, which is currently being refurbished.



St Pauls' Church, Leamington Spa and the clock presented to Caleb England

Martin said he hoped he had indicated the importance of researching the smaller medals, not necessarily VC or great acts of valour, but of normal humble people who would if not for this type of research would be forgotten forever.

Finally – Martin had had the clock repaired and it now works – beautiful Whittington Chime on his mantelpiece.



Leamington Spa War Memorial