

FIREMAN BOOK STORY

The scrapbook about the Firemen was given to Mr A. T. Walker in 1965 by Ellen Hill, the daughter of its compiler, **Mr John Knott**. The book is an exercise book into which Mr Knott stuck a number of cuttings and pictures connected with fires and related matters. He lived in Beach Avenue, Birchington and was a gardener by trade. He lived in the gardener's accommodation at **Rossetti Bungalow** in Beach Avenue. The earliest entry in the book is dated 1882, the year that Rossetti died in this particular house, but whether John Knott was the gardener there then is not yet clear. He married Ellen's mother Eliza in 1884. The entry in the marriage register reads:-

29th March 1884 - **John Knott** aged 25 of Birchington
(a gardener) married **Eliza Stewart Murphy** aged 27 also
from Birchington (father was Jeremiah Murphy, a Coastguard)

When Eliza gave birth to their first child, Henry James, they were certainly living at the bungalow by then. Henry was baptized at All Saints Church, Birchington on 16 September 1888 and they were still there when their daughter Ellen Mary was baptized on 1 June 1890. John is not in the list of firemen on the 'Duties and Rota List' of about 1885, which is included in the book, but his daughter stated that he was in Birchington's Fire Brigade, hence his fascination with fires. Living in Rossetti Bungalow meant that he lived fairly near the Brigade Depot, which was just over the railway bridge.

He continued to add items of interest to the book until 1901 and during that time was also using it as a place to jot down the notes on various additional jobs that he took on. These were outside his gardening work for Mr O'Hagan, who owned 'Rossetti Bungalow' by then. John may have been related to Henry Knott, who ran the Coachworks. His business was at the rear of 'Grove House' opposite the Smugglers. Henry Knott had his home across the road in 'The Sycamores'. This house later became part of Jenner's Garage.

John Knott's jobs were all manual and included among other things carting, sharpening tools and mowing hay. Judging by the entries on pages 27-28, (both scanned) he worked very long hours, as was the custom in his lifetime.

Ellen was baptized and confirmed in All Saints Church. Her father died in 1901 and was buried in All Saints churchyard on 9th March aged only 42. When he died he was still the gardener for Rossetti Bungalow, but as the job and their home went together, her mother will have had to find somewhere else for her little family to live shortly after her husband's death. Ellen was eleven and Harry was fifteen at that time. It would appear that they moved to 3 Brunswick Place, Park Lane, as a Mrs John Knott was living there by 1905.

Ellen married George Harry Hill in All Saints Church, aged 27, on 8th February 1919. She was 28 at the time of her marriage. George was a Lance Corporal with the 14th Warwickshire Regiment and had served through the First World War. The register states that his father was William Hill, a gardener. It also states that Ellen's own father was deceased by then. There are two witnesses to the wedding, Annie Knott and Edward Willis Castle. Annie was Ellen's sister-in-law and had married her brother Henry 12th February 1911. Ellen had been a witness at her wedding, too, as had Edward Castle.

When her brother was married to Annie Dalbey he was 22 and she was 24. They continued to live in Birchington, first of all near his mother in Brunswick Place and then at 20, Crescent Road. He died in 1948 and was buried at All Saints on 8th November, aged 60. Henry's wife Annie died on 8th November 1962.

From a conversation with Mr Walker, in which Ellen said she and her husband left Birchington 42 ago, it appears that Ellen and George must have left Birchington in 1923. Where they went initially is not known but they eventually ended up in Bletchley. In his note Mr Walker wrote that her husband was also buried in All Saints churchyard. By 1965 Ellen was 75 and living at 4 Hazelgrove, BLETCHLEY, Bucks. However, checking through the All Saints' registers, there is no mention of George Hill's burial. On the other hand, Ellen's mother was buried at All Saints, even though she was living at 22 Maud Road, Bletchley when she died. Presumably she had taken the Fire Book with her when she moved up to be near her daughter, and the book was then inherited by Ellen. Her mother's funeral was at All Saints on 2nd November 1931 aged 74.

In 1965, Ellen Hill got in touch with Mr Walker. She asked him if he would like the book, saying she felt it ought to come 'home' to Birchington, where it had begun its life. Whether this meant she had no children who would have valued it is unclear. Mr Walker was more than delighted to receive it. At the time of writing this note (January 2005) the book is now held by Peter Linington at Somali Farm, Park Road, Birchington. Peter is the son-in-law of Mr Walker.

Description of the book

It is a board covered exercise book. The boards are covered in red leather with a fine gold-tooled line around the edge of front and back covers.

The pages of the book are faint-lined for writing.

The spine is banded with seven gold lines at 3.5 cm apart

Dimensions of the book

Width	19 cm
Height	22 cm
Depth	1.3 cm

There is a picture of a fire scene stuck on both the front and back covers. These two outer pictures are in rather poor condition now.

The book contains many newspaper cuttings of fire incidents and fire fighting equipment, both local and national, as well as a picture of fire fighting in China. Interspersed with these are odd notes in black, blue or red inks, detailing various jobs he had done, the hours he worked and the money he earned from them.