

Round And About In The Parish.....

This article concerns "West Watch" along the Birch Grove Road. The appearance of the property today is very different from when the first photos, from around 1924, appear. West Watch was built about 1885, extended in the 1920's and again more recently.



The little building at the side, shown above and right, was once a Saddler's shop. The earliest trace I have found of a harness maker in Birch Grove was Eliza Smith, a widow aged 71. She has a boarder with her - George Anscombe who is also described as a harness maker although exactly where she lived cannot be completely clarified.



Although unclear from this small photo, upon enlargement, there is a sign on the property saying, "Sadler" and from the 1881 Census Joseph Smith is here described as a 'Harness Maker'. He can clearly be traced through the 1891 and 1901 census returns.

At the time of the 1911 census Charles Smith is the Harness Maker, and he appears in the 1891 census as Joseph's son. In the 1911 census Edith Dennis, a widow born in 1876, is in occupation as a caretaker and her address is recorded as West Watch Stable.

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In 1922 Sir Sydney Skinner, who was a director of Derry and Toms, purchased West Watch as a family holiday home - the same year he was knighted.

The gardens were always quite a feature of the property and Mr Percy Varnum was the Head Gardener. This photo (below) from about the 1920's shows the Nutley Flower Show Committee and Mr Varnum who was born in 1888 is 3rd in from the left - top row. (Ellen Dilley - Mr

Varnum's married daughter - worked for Dame Margery Corbett Ashby at Wickens (the Danehill Parish Historical Society's first President) - which is a stone's throw from West Watch.



Sir Sydney recalled that many a time he walked down the Brompton Road from school at 10 years of age to work from 6 am until 12 at night selling goods. 'I was rewarded with a cup of coffee and a little bit of cheese,

sleeping under the counter and going home next morning. That was my introduction to the Drapery Trade'.

