

## **Martin, Wells and Company (1869-1875)**

Another individual, who had heard of the opportunities presented in the village, soon to be the town of Aldershot, was Mr. John Martin. He was a builder from the little village of Hartley Row in Hampshire, who transferred, with his brother Edward Martin, his business to Aldershot. Here he met Henry Wells, whom he took into his employment, in Aldershot. The firm enjoyed a prosperous time taking on numerous contracts. Unfortunately, John Martin passed away in 1869, and the business came upon the market. Henry Wells undertook to join John's brother Edward Martin as a partner and form Martin, Wells and Company.

In 1862 Henry and Elizabeth's first son Alfred was born. Elizabeth was gaining her first experience of motherhood, having another eleven children in following years. What is quite different from many families of this period, all but four of the children survived living well into old age. One can only wonder if their parents understood the dangers faced with childhood at this time? Their second son Samuel Griffiths Wells was born two years later in 1864, followed by John Henry Wells in 1866.

Nationally there was a huge change to many in the population when in 1867 the Second (or Great) Reform Act was passed. This gave the franchise to not only householders and many tenants, but also to agricultural tenants with small amounts of land. In essence the electorate in England and Wales doubled from 1 to 2 million. This was to have had a profound effect upon the Wells family (or at least the male members, as women were still disenfranchised), giving the men over 21 years of age, the vote for the first time.

Henry and Elizabeth's fourth son George, was born in 1868, but unfortunately succumbed to a problem of infancy and passed away a mere two years later.

European conflict was prevalent in 1870 when Prussia invaded France, therefore the position of the British Army remained to the fore, with the new Prime Minister Mr. Gladstone taking charge after defeating Benjamin Disraeli for the first time in the election. A knock-on effect of this conflict showed that the newly built Portsmouth Forts were in fact not really required. Prussia took the defeat of Napoleon III's France out of the equation as a possible aggressor for the last time after hundreds of years threat to England.

We see, from the Hampshire Archives, that Martin, Wells and Company were very active in the building of the new town of Aldershot. The company continued building domestic dwellings in prime locations as the town expanded. Edward Street appeared to be an early centre for this expansion, but gradually moving to other areas of the new town, eventually working on the new Manor Park Estate of St. Georges Road and St. Michaels Road.

In 1870 Henry and Elizabeth's first daughter Lily Wells was born followed by Rose in 1872 and Beatrice in 1874. However, another baby born in 1873 died at birth or was still born and was unnamed, as was a second born in 1876.

The 1871 census shows Henry Wells was living at 158 Church Street, with his growing family and more importantly stating his job as a builder.

The opening, on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1873, of the Western District Schools in Aldershot took place with the usual fanfare of a supper for all concerned. Here Henry Wells was congratulated as providing satisfaction as a contractor to which he acknowledged that ratepayers could not say that the School Board had not received the worth of their money. Henry was certainly demonstrating to all that he was not only a competent contractor, he amply demonstrated his company was value for money.

This was the first school built in the new town, and was conceived under the recent Education Act of 1870 that had been passed by the House of Commons with no opposition from any quarter. The school accommodated teaching of children between 3 and 13 years of age.

By 1877 the now well-established company of Martin, Wells and Company was demonstrating that not only were they successful businessmen but they were taking social responsibility in line with their status as a major force in Aldershot. This is amply shown as recorded in a Subscription List in the local newspaper where the company had given ten guineas to the Sufferers of Famine in South India, and being the highest contributors in Aldershot in that list.

1877 also was the year daughter Florence Elizabeth Wells was born followed by the last son to be born to the family, Percy Harold Edward Wells in 1879. In 1883 the Henry and Elizabeth's last child Gertrude Winifred Alice was born who unfortunately passed away only a year later in 1864.

A departure from house and Army building was taken by Martin, Wells and Company, when the company took a contract to build Aldershot's first new church, Holy Trinity, in Albert Road, commencing in 1875 and completed in 1878. Aldershot already had a church, St Michaels, that had stood in the centre of the historic village for many hundreds of years. However, it was felt that a new church nearer to the Camp and the new town springing up to serve the Camp, possibly as a bastion against the Demon Drink, was desperately needed. Therefore this new church to accommodate 600 people was built at a cost of £6000.

Martin, Wells and Company appears regularly within the local press, not only for Aldershot but further afield in Basingstoke and Hampshire generally. For instance they show themselves as Ironmongers, Timber Merchants and Oil and Colourmen, diversifying into many different trades as well as agents for plate glass, insurance and for a Building Society to help finance householders wishing to purchase the many new dwellings springing up in what now was a town.

It wasn't just within the confines of Aldershot town that Martin, Wells and Company was now in operation. A report dated January 15<sup>th</sup> 1876 in Sheldrake's Military Journal describes in great detail the newly completed Depot at Kingston-Upon-Thames for the War Department Authorities. This Depot with a size of 100 acres comprised an entrance keep guard room and prisoner's rooms, an arms store for 3000 stands of arms (Martini-Henry rifles), Magazines, Officer's Quarters, Stables, two blocks for housing soldiers and non-commissioned officers together with a cooking house and sanitary facilities.

These buildings were built around a parade ground, and surrounded by a 10-foot-high wall. Not an insubstantial contract but one seemingly well suited to the now experienced company and its founders. Similar developments were undertaken as Government Contractors at the Barracks both at Bury St. Edmunds and Lincoln.

### Brickyards at Rowhills (Cranmore Lane)

**MARTIN, WELLS & CO. LTD.,**  
 Head Offices, Works, Showrooms  
**VICTORIA ROAD, ALDERSHOT.**

Brickyard ROWHILLS, ALDERSHOT. English Timber Yard: CANAL WHARF Farnboro' Road, ALDERSHOT  
 London Offices and Works: 25, AUCLAND STREET, VAUXHALL, S.E. Branch Offices and Works: YORKTOWN, SURREY

**BUILDERS & GENERAL CONTRACTORS.**  
**STEAM JOINERY WORKS.**  
**BRICK & TILE MANUFACTURERS**  
**ENGLISH & FOREIGN TIMBER MERCHANTS.**  
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 IRONMONGERS, FOUNDERS, AND SMITHS.  
 GAS, WATER, AND MECHANICAL ENGINEERS.  
**PLUMBERS, PAINTERS, & DECORATORS IN ALL BRANCHES**  
 Contractors for—  
**IMPROVED WOOD BLOCK FLOORING.**  
**IMPROVED GRANOLITHIC PAVINGS.**

### 100 room Hotel at Bexhill-on-Sea

Durward Brown is the architect of the building, the arrangement of which is a testimony to his professional skill, which is so well known in Bexhill, while the contractors are the firm of Messrs. **Martin Wells and Company**, of Aldershot. Building operations commenced on the 3rd of June last year; about a hundred men have been engaged, and the work has proceeded rapidly, as a look at the extensive block will show. It is hoped to get the hotel ready for opening by next Christmas. In all, there are about one hundred rooms on the four floors. The building is well windowed throughout, and has three frontages, an exceptional advantage, which visitors will appreciate. On the ground floor are the dining-room, coffee-room, library, and billiard-room; on the lower ground floor are situated the grill rooms and smoking lounge. The main entrance is in Sea-road.

### Shops at Deadwater, Hampshire

Charles Webb, 2, St. Felix Villas, St. George's-road, Farnham, said he was foreman to Messrs. **Martin Wells and Company**, of Aldershot, and he was actually engaged in the building of Messrs. Frisby and **Company's** premises, Deadwater. He produced plans of the buildings showing the position of the different shops.

### Riding School at Regent's Park

**THE COMPOSER AND THE BUILDERS.**  
 LIGHT OPERA SCORES AND HEAVY SHOWERS.

In the Queen's Bench Division to-day, Mr. Justice Lawrence had before him the case of Solomon v. **Martin Wells and Company**. This was an action brought by Mr. E. Solomon, the musical composer, against the defendants to recover damages for trespass and injury to the score of two operas upon which he had been at work. The defendants denied the trespass, and in alternative pleaded that it was committed by persons licensed by the plaintiff. They denied the damage, and pleaded that if the plaintiff had sustained damage, it was amply covered by the £10 which they had paid into court. The plaintiff resides at Thanet Lodge, Regent's Park, and the defendants, who are builders, were engaged in erecting a riding-school, one wall of which abutted on the defendant's premises. At the time the trespass was alleged to have been committed the plaintiff was away from home, but on his return in September, 1892, he discovered that defendants had erected a scaffolding on the flat roof of his study upon which bricks and mortar and other materials had been stacked. The plaintiff put the matter into the hands of his solicitor, who communicated with the defendants, the result of which was the bricks and mortar, &c., were at once removed. Subsequently the rain came through the roof, and completely flooded the study, damaging the score of the two operas, completely obliterating certain portions, which rendered an entirely new composition necessary, and increasing the labours of the plaintiff to about ten days, for which he claimed £20 a day. The plaintiff was called, and said, averaging the amount of time he put into an opera, and the time it ran, he realised about £39 a day.

### Sewage Farm at Farnborough

The Farnborough sewage farm question still drags on. In order to save the council from being prosecuted by the Thames Conservators and fined £50 a day as long as the pollution of the Black-water stream by the offensive effluent of the farm continued, the council have accepted for the sewage farm a scheme by which it is hoped to secure an effluent "fit to turn into any stream." The details of the scheme are not stated. So much as is known is that Messrs. **Martin Wells and Company**, of Aldershot, are to be paid £2,000 in six half-yearly instalments from the rates for providing an engine-house with gas tank, two filter beds, and a cottage for the fireman.

**MARTIN, WELLS, & Co.,**  
**Ironmongers.**  
 OIL AND COLORMEN,  
 TIMBER MERCHANTS,  
**Builders & General Contractors**  
 WELLINGTON STREET, ALDERSHOT.

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**BAR AND SHEET IRON,**  
 Wrought and Cut Nails, Screws, Bolts, Horse Nails, Files and Rasps, Stoves and Banges, Cutlery, Rain-water pipes, Gutterings, Gas and Water Pipe, Cocks, Plumbers' Fittings, Lead, Zinc, Brass, and Copper Goods, Builders' and other  
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