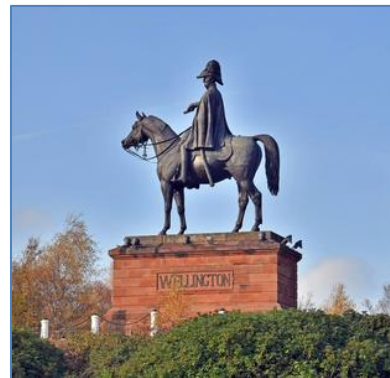


## Henry Wells - Civic Leader (1885-1903)

The year 1885 brought another major contract for Martin, Wells and Company allowing Henry to rub shoulders with not only the aristocracy and gentry but also the Royal Family. To understand the significance of this event, we need to go back in time a little. To commemorate the victorious General at the Battle of Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington, an equestrian statue was erected atop a Triumphal Arch at Hyde Park Corner in London. This was not just any statue but the largest equestrian statue in England, with a length nose to tail of 26ft (8 metres), weighing 40 tons (36,287 kilos). However all was not well with this statue's location as it was out of proportion with its environs. (Apparently Queen Victoria was most certainly not impressed with its proportions and position.)



Eventually in 1883 the statue was removed and in fact the arch was also moved to its current location at the top of Constitution Hill, London.

It was decided, after much debate to remove the statue that was lying sadly in pieces, to a new location chosen by the Prince of Wales. That location was to be atop a specially created mound, on Round Hill, in Aldershot. The chosen contractor to undertake the re-erection was none other than that well-known Aldershot builder and contractor Martin, Wells and Company. The ceremony in 1885, for the unveiling of the statue in its current position was headed by the Prince of Wales together with the Duke of Connaught, Prince George and Lord Arthur Somerset. A royal salute of 21 guns was fired and a huge march-past was undertaken by the Army. Henry had landed well and truly on his feet and established himself amongst the gentry.

Several other prestigious contracts were undertaken about the same time. The alterations to the Tower of London, and the work to the prison at Wormwood Scrubs.

18<sup>th</sup> April 1885 brought a significant change to the business relationships for Henry Wells when his partner Edward Martin passed away. Edward had been ailing throughout the winter and died at the age of 63 years, leaving a son and daughter. From this time on Henry was essentially a sole agent.

By October 1890 Henry Wells was sitting as a County Councillor for Hampshire County Council, so no longer solely looking after Aldershot and its inhabitants, but the wider community of the county.

1890 Marriage at Holy Trinity church, Aldershot of Miss Lily Wells, eldest daughter of Henry Wells to Harry Percy Willcox, of Claremont, Leamington.

#### MARRIAGE OF MISS WELLS.

On Thursday Miss Lily Wells, the eldest daughter of Mr. Henry Wells, of Llanover House, Aldershot, an esteemed townsman and county councillor, was wedded to Mr. Harry Percy Willcox, of Claremont, Leamington. The happy event was celebrated at eleven o'clock in the morning at Holy Trinity Church, in the presence of a large circle of friends and well wishers not only of the bride and bridegroom but of Mr. Wells and the whole of his family. The weather on Thursday was auspicious, and as the gods favoured the event, if there is any truth in the old saying "Happy is the bride that the sun shines on" happy indeed will be the lives of the newly-wedded couple. The ceremony was impressively performed by the vicar of Holy Trinity, the Rev. J. de Verd Leigh, and a very appropriate address full of excellent advice was delivered. The bride, who was given away by her father, wore a train of rich white corded silk with brocaded front, and tulle veil and a wreath of orange blossoms. Among her adornments was a pearl and diamond pendant, the gift of the bridegroom, and she carried a beautiful bouquet. The best man was Mr. Douglas McMichael, cousin of the bridegroom. The bridesmaids were the Misses. Rose, Beatrice, and Florence Wells, Miss Willcox and Miss K. Willcox. Their

Wells, Miss Willcox and Miss K. Willcox. Their dresses were composed of pale heliotrope cashmere and white silk, and they wore brooches and bangles. As the happy couple left the church the wedding march was magnificently rendered by Mr. Seth Johnson, on the organ. At the door of the church there was a large crowd of spectators who saluted not only the bride and bridegroom with showers of rice, but also the bridesmaids and relatives, the only individual who stood the bombardment with equanimity being Mr. Vince, whose white helmet afforded him good protection as he performed his important duties at the door. A goodly party sat down to breakfast in a marquee on the lawn at Llanover House well provided by Mr. A. J. Marsh, confectioner, High-street. *Menu*:—Filletts of salmon and turbot, lobster salad, roast lamb and beef, glazed ham and ox tongue, roast chicken, aspic jelly, apricot chartreuse, trifle, tipsy cake, fruit jelly, apple snow, nesselrode pudding, strawberry ice, Italian meringues, chassotte rousse, and noyau jelly. Mr. Marsh also supplied the elegant bride-cake, which was greatly admired by the wedding guests. The usual toasts followed.

During the 1890s Martin, Wells and Company were engaged to erect new brick-built Barracks to replace the original wooden huts of The Camp at Aldershot. These Permanent Barracks eventually remained until the 1960s. To provide the bricks for this major redevelopment, Henry rented clay pits in Rowhill Copse, near Cranmore Lane, Aldershot and this is probably when that small community evolved, forming what we now know as Brickfields off Cranmore Lane, comprising cottages originally built to house the brickfield workers.

On March 10th 1892 Henry was returned as member for Aldershot West Ward of Hampshire County Council again and unopposed.

Much to the dismay of many of his friends and work colleagues, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1897 Henry was elected Overseer for the assessments committee for the Poor Rate in Aldershot. Under the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, parishes were grouped together into Unions, each with a Board of Guardians elected by local property owners to administer poor relief. Each Union had a Workhouse which all had to enter if they were unable to find work. Overseers were the most important people responsible for administering poor relief and were also responsible for both collecting the poor rate and administering relief. The Overseer had to produce accounts showing where the money was spent. Henry obviously found this role essential in his vision of tending for the inhabitants of Aldershot, ensuring that the requirements of the Poor Law were not only seen to being enacted but that they were providing the essentials he believed necessary under his heartfelt Christian ethics, as well as the additional responsibilities of vaccination and school attendance.

1894 Henry Wells (on right) and Thomas Jerome, surveyor



At the June 26<sup>th</sup> 1897 sitting of the Court of Quarter Sessions at the Castle of Winchester, Henry Wells was included as one of the new Magistrates. However, Henry was certainly not forgetting his association with the Particular or Strict Baptist Church. In September the same year he is reported as attending the Anniversary Service and following Tea in Fleet, where fifty were present.

1898 brought a major family event when Henry's daughter Florence Elizabeth Wells married Frederick John Lloyd, the son of the Aldershot farmer and landowner. This was a major local event with two well-known and respected Aldershot families joining together.



*Frederick John Lloyd was married to Florence Elizabeth Wells in 1898.*

In the same year Henry was Vice Chairman of the Farnham and Aldershot Board of Guardians when they agreed to the erection of a new infirmary for the Farnham Workhouse and to seek sanction from the Local Government Board without delay.

Henry was well ensconced within the new town of Aldershot and by 1903 had built himself a large house on The Grove, Llanover House, right in the core of his town, sadly now no longer existing for us to see.