

## The Funeral and Obituaries 1908

Henry Wells passed away on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1908 at the age of 73, after a long illness. His funeral on 9<sup>th</sup> November was attended by the great and good of Aldershot as well as his workforce and many others from the town who were associated or had contact with Henry over his many years living and building in the town. The crowds gathered even though the day was reported as being cold with a brisk north easterly wind blowing. Even at his funeral he was able to exert his individual nature when instead of the service taking place in the Mortuary Chapel as was the norm for that time, it took place instead at the graveside and was taken by his friend Reverend J Eddison, the pastor at the Rochdale Baptist Chapel.

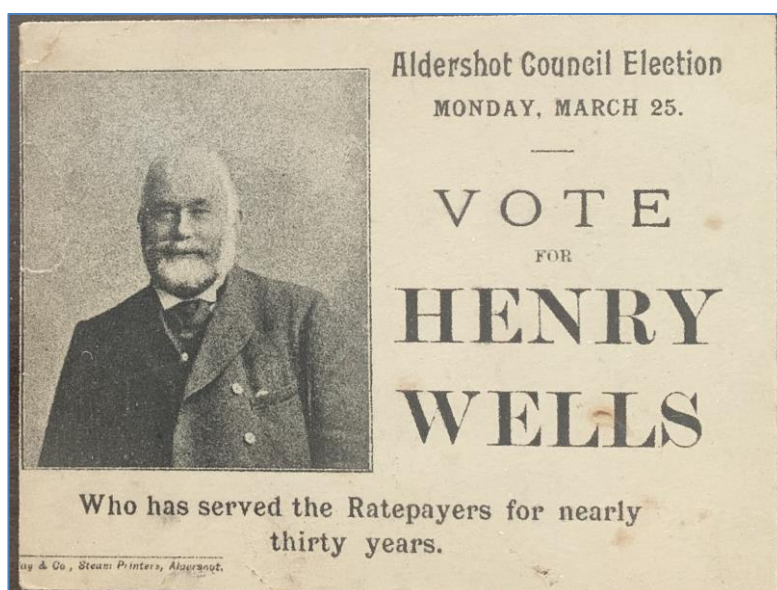
A view of his character and demeanor can be grasped from Obituary Notices published in local papers where it was stated that Henry:-

'was bluff, even brusque in speech at times, and in public almost domineering in manner, these were but the transient faults of a man of great capacity of mind and extraordinary force of character, but tender hearted as a woman to those in trouble.'

'He dispensed charity quietly but with exceeding generosity that was the chief characteristic of the man.'

'He gave freely, not only of money, but time and thought, in the service of others. His wise counsel set many a man on the right road and it was a proud boast of his that many of the men who worked for him had been able to buy their own houses and provide against old age.'

There was scarcely any important public position, which he was not called upon to fill at one time or another. In elections he was always sure of general support, and was usually returned at the head of the poll. His popularity never changed the simplicity of his habits of life. Old fashioned in some respects, he was an ardent believer in progress and in the benefits of education.



Henry Wells won the respect of all who served him and although the head of a large concern, his presence was always open to any employee. He never expected any one employee, to undertake services that he was himself not capable of discharging. He had started from the first step of the ladder, he had climbed to the top, and in his good fortune had never turned his head or soured his disposition.

Henry was always the guiding power of the firm Martin, Wells and Company. With no one did he relegate the chief works of the concern. and at six o'clock in the morning was his normal starting time. If that was the hour to start, at that time he expected his employees to be assigned to their various posts of the day. Such devotion to his business brought its own rewards. Far from dealing with contracts for hundreds of pounds, in the end it was not an uncommon thing for contracts involving the expenditure of hundreds of thousands of pounds to be entered into and be satisfactorily carried into completion. With pride Henry looked upon his handiwork at Aldershot, London and elsewhere, for the name of Martin, Wells and Company was associated with all large military undertakings.

## Henry Wells - in his own words 1898

To hear from the man himself is an extraordinary instance from so long ago. However, we are fortunate in having a publication that captured a conversation with Henry, as below.

An interesting interview with Henry Wells took place on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1898 by **Sheldrake's Aldershot Military Gazette**. The interview is repeated, in full, allowing Henry to speak to us in his own voice.

The interviewee was;

**Mr. Henry Wells JP**, a partner in the firm of Messrs. Martin, Wells & Co., builders in Wellington Street. He lived in Edward Street and later moved into Llanover House in The Grove.

*Being aware of the fact that Mr Henry Wells is one of the oldest of property owners of that part of the West End, the writer gave him a look up the other evening, and found him comfortably ensconced in an armchair in a garden tent that he had rigged up on the lawn. The weather was very hot, and it was refreshing to sit there awhile, during the chat that followed.*

*You have noticed, perhaps, that I have been having interesting chats with old inhabitants about old Aldershot, said the writer.*

Mr Wells said he had read them.

*Well, knowing that you were one of the first, if not the first, to build in the West End, I thought I should like a chat to you. This remark at once sent Mr Wells' mind running back to the early days of his life.*

Mr Wells said he came to Aldershot early in 1855, and was on the staff of Mr. Myers, the great contractor, to whom the Government had entrusted the building of the Barracks. on the return of the troops from Crimea. The wooden huts of the two camps were erected by other firms, with the exception of the brick-built foundations and chimneys, and that Myers did.

*What was the date when the work of the buildings started?*

All the huts forming South Camp commenced in February 1855, said Mr Wells, on returning from indoors, and bringing with him rather an ancient-looking little book, in which evidently, he had jotted down many little items of interest years ago. The huts commenced in July of the same year.

*What about the permanent barracks?*

The infantry barracks were commenced on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 1856, and the cavalry barracks in July. There were thousands of men employed. The first regiment quartered in the barracks was the Lancaster Militia.

They arrived 14<sup>th</sup> December 1857 and were brought into the place from over the Tongham line, and thence I think over the temporary branch line that was laid to bring in bricks from Ash.

*What do you know about the West End?*

I was one of the first to build there, about the time the 'Hole in the Wall' was put up. The first two houses that I built were those two near the 'White Hart', a small shop and a garage. Tommy Drew said "I understand that you are building here in Aldershot- you must be a foolish fellow. It won't be long before the soldiers will be gone, and the weeds and the grass will be growing again". I told him when they had beat the swords into pruning hooks, it might be so, but not before - then the barracks would not be wanted. The two houses I put up have never been empty.

*How was it that you dropped upon West End to build, it was so out of the way - from where the town is?*

But there was no town then - there were no buildings, in fact nothing but an old cottage, upon the site where Aldershot now stands.

*How was the building started up at West End?*

Just for the same reason why houses started up in other places. People speculated as to where houses started in other places. People speculated as to where the town would form itself. The military cut a way through the wall at the bottom of what is now known as Cambridge Road. The owners of the land then cut Cambridge Road out, and up went those two large houses that now occupy the two corners. Licences were obtained for both. The largest was called "Victoria Hotel", and kept by Mr. Williams. What is now known as Church Street, and that part of Queen's Road from the "White Hart" to Sandy Pit Lane, was also cut out, and up went the houses. The road from the 'White Hart' that runs down to the town was not in existence, in fact no one could get up to West End except by the Boundary Wall or through the Parish Clerk's Land. The Wesleyans put up their old iron chapel at the corner opposite the "Cambridge". Cambridge Villas were built by John Cooper. He was a butler to an old lady. He committed suicide afterwards. All the hopes and prospects of the party who started that part of West End, however, were blighted by the decision of the military to close the opening at the bottom of Cambridge Road, which they did, and West End remained as it was for years before any more buildings went up. In fact, it was not until the town grew in that direction that other houses were erected.

*I presume that Cambridge Road, Church Street and Queen's Road, from the White Hart to Sandy Pit Lane were the first new roads ever cut out in Aldershot?*

Almost. The road from the White Hart to the Cambridge used to be called Cambridge Road. When the new road was cut from the town, it was changed in the late years to Queen's Road. Church Street got its name because of the iron Wesleyan Chapel that was built.

*I suppose there were but few old roads in the parish when the camp came?*

Very few. There was only Church Lane, Sandy Pit Lane, Malthouse Lane, Ash Road, Brighton Road, Lower Farnham Road and Eggar's Hill. Eggar's Hill I know, used to be called Twynham's Lane, but got its name because Mr. Eggar afterwards lived there.

Ash Road ran up what is now the Avenue to the old Farnborough Road, and an old right of way road came in by the Police Station through what is now Wellington Street to an old cottage that stood behind the London and County Bank, and which was pulled down to build the Arcade.

*Yes, I have managed to get a photo of that old house, and the resident, - Mr Knight - who lived for so many years in it. It was called by many of the older people "No.1, Aldershot", and I am going to publish a chat about it soon, and also give a picture of the old place.*

*It is said that what is now the old Lock Hospital was the first Police Station.*

No, that was not the first. The first Police Station was where the South Cavalry Barracks are, close to old Barnett's cottage, referred to by Butty Phar (William Pharo), last week. The military, however, wanted the land, and what is now the Lock Hospital was the first police building, and the police moved the erection to where it now stands.

*I suppose it was a queer life in Aldershot during the first few years of the camp here?*

There is no doubt about it, there was little or no accommodation for all the work people to live, and most of them had to walk to houses in other parishes. It was a shocking state of affairs for the women of the 'unfortunate' class. They slept about the common, in sand pits, under the furze, and wherever they could crawl into. It was simply awful. They lay about like animals.

*I am told that it was no uncommon thing to find one of them dead about the place.*

That is so. It was a great change when the Contagious Disease Act came in. It changed all that. But it has proved a curse to the country since the Contagious Disease Act was done away with. People that agitated for the change knew nothing about the practical and awful side of the question. I knew a good deal before I sat upon the present Lock Hospital Committee, but my convictions have been confirmed tenfold since and as Chairman I have seen a good deal. I really think a war with the loss of half a million men would not hurt the life of England as much as has been done since the removal of the Contagious Disease Act. Thousands of men return to country life and town life in a terrible state. The Rev. Ellis Hewett, the late Presbyterian minister, was strong against it in his earlier life, but after he had been to our Lock Hospital Committee, he became a convert to the Contagious Disease Act and honestly said he longed to see the Act restored. That was because of what he saw. His previous views were because of what he had heard. The people who are against the Act today don't know anything about the matter and its awful effects in the naval and military stations and large towns, said Mr Wells as I left him.

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DEATH OF MR. HENRY WELLS, J.P.  
 GOOD CITIZEN AND FAITHFUL FRIEND.  
 TOWN'S TRIBUTE OF AFFECTION AND ESTEEM.

Henry Wells passed away on 6<sup>th</sup> November 1908 at the age of 73.

Registration District <i>Southampton</i>									
Sub-District <i>Aldershot</i>									
1908 DEATHS in the Sub-District of <i>Aldershot</i> in the County of <i>Southampton</i>									
Columns:—	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
No.	When and Where Died.	Name and Surname.	Sex.	Age.	Rank or Profession.	Cause of Death.	Signature, Description, and Residence of Informant.	When registered.	Signature of Registrar.
<i>214</i>	<i>Sixth November 1908. The Grove, Ald.</i>	<i>Henry Wells</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>73 years</i>	<i>Retired Soldier L.P.</i>	<i>Diabetes Mellitus Diabetic coma. Verified by F. Stoyan L.R.C.P.</i>	<i>H. Wells Son Church Lane, Aldershot</i>	<i>Sixth November 1908</i>	<i>Geo. Benson Registrar</i>

His funeral as described earlier, took place in two halves; the first was at his home Llanover House, in The Grove, Aldershot. The funeral cortege followed by many carriages then proceeded to the Redan Road Cemetery where a service took place at the graveside rather than as was then normal in the Mortuary Chapel. The service was officiated by Henry's old friend, the Baptist Minister Rev. J Eddison of Rochdale Baptist Chapel.



Aldershot had lost its guiding light with the passing of Henry Wells. However his sons who he had ensured were well prepared for their individual careers, as well as most of his daughters married into Aldershot's new society. They would then carry on the families and Henry's own work in ensuring the town he helped create would flourish and prosper for many decades to come.

## **A Legacy of Henry Wells for Today**

A specific aspect of this legacy, particularly pertinent to those living in the Rowhills area today, was the purchase of more than 70 acres of Rowhill Copse lands by Henry Wells in 1902. He had previously rented the land, no doubt for both clay and timber extraction. But, when this land became available, on the market, a purchase was made. The outcome of this purchase was the establishment of what became known as The Wells Estate and included Rowhill Copse and adjoining roads.

The Wells family apparently held this estate in trust, probably as Henry had arranged. Upon his death the Rowhills Estate Trust allowed his family to benefit from what then became attractive development land.

However, rather than sell all to a developer and take a short-term profit, the family built a series of houses in the area, putting the properties out for rental particularly amongst the numerous numbers of senior military figures from Aldershot Garrison. This meant that the area became safeguarded from dense development and stayed as a somewhat backwater that even in more recent years has only been subject to small-scale infill development, allowing the Rowhills area to become its present enclave. The actual Rowhill Copse, although degraded significantly in area, has been retained and left at present at least as a substantial amenity to the local population.

None of this would have happened if Henry Wells had not had the foresight to purchase the land albeit as a legacy for his family.