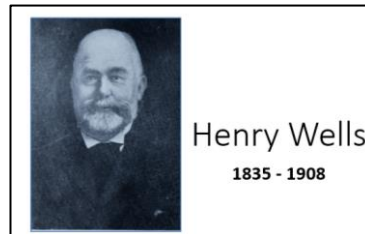


**Henry Wells - Presentation by John Barnett
at Rowhill Nature Reserve Field Centre - March 2023**

This evening I will look with you at England and the world in the mid-19th century in an effort to try to understand the canvas we are painting. We will look at Henry Wells's very humble origins, his arrival and the beginning of his career in Aldershot. We will then briefly investigate the reasons for the building of the Camp in Aldershot (although this is the subject of a detailed talk in itself). We shall progress with Henry gradually being accepted into the new social hierarchy in Aldershot and his life within the Baptist church, looking also at the scope of works he is associated with. We shall finally review his life and try to understand the importance of Henry Wells to Aldershot today.



So to begin with, who was Henry Wells? One of Aldershot's most famous people who I suspect a majority of Aldershot residents have never heard of. Why am I interested in this man?

Whilst researching the origins of Aldershot's military past, one name kept cropping up, that of Henry Wells, and as part of the history of Rowhills I thought a short piece on Henry should accompany it. Much to my surprise I was to discover that there does not appear to have been a biography written of this man, and he seems to have been somewhat forgotten. His photographs are on display at the Aldershot Military Museum but very little information is provided. The more I delved into his story, the more I was intrigued and I resolved to try to save the story of Henry Wells for posterity.

So what is so interesting about this man? Well I think it is the combination of a man in his time that stood head and shoulders above many of his contemporaries combined with the remarkable era he lived in and the overarching story of Aldershot itself. Let's go back to the beginning and look in outline at the country of England at the time of Henry's youth.

England was at this time living with the outcome of the Napoleonic Wars that had been over for a number of decades. The country felt reasonably safe having the Royal Navy acting as the world's policeman and the dreaded French still reeling from a comprehensive defeat. Technology was coming well and truly to the fore, with first the Agricultural Revolution revolutionising farming methods closely followed by the Industrial Revolution, with the old ways of living being turned on their head and the population on the move from the countryside to the cities. Population was exploding and there were waves of immigrants. (All sounds familiar??)

Henry was the son of an agricultural labourer, born in 1835.

Henry Wells, (son of Henry Wells) was born on 25th January 1835 into the home of the agricultural labourer, Henry Wells at the village of Ivinghoe in Buckinghamshire.

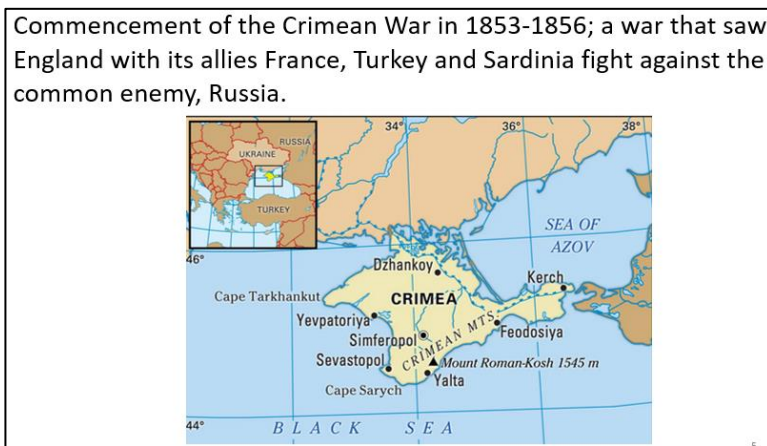
The image shows a genealogical chart for Henry Wells. At the top, it lists Henry Wells (1835-1908) and Leah Clarke (1800-1872). Below them, a horizontal line represents their children. The names of the children are listed below the line: George Wells (1837-1880), Elizabeth A. Thomas (1838-1892), Charles Wells (1839-1874), Thomas Wells (1840-1885), John Wells (1841-1875), Harriett Thomas (1842-1891), Henry Wells (1843-1874), Elizabeth Wells (1844-1891), Frederick Wells (1845-1871), Edna Wells (1846-1871), Frederick Wells (1847-1871), Ernest Wells (1848-1871), James Whitmore Peck (1849-1871), and Maria Wells (1850-1871). Each name is accompanied by a small portrait icon and birth/death dates.

The Wells family was living in the village of Ivinghoe in Buckinghamshire, 33 miles northwest of London. The family in the 1840s was engaged in the straw plaiting industry. In fact, virtually the entire village were equally involved.



The straw plaits were being used as the basis for the manufacture of artisan straw bonnets and hats that had become a must-have fashion accessory. The improvements in transport allowed movement of goods relatively easily therefore the straw plaits were then sent to millinery workshops to make the headwear. However, for some members of the Wells family this rural existence was set to change. News was received, probably in the form of flyers, that able-bodied men were required urgently to work on the huge new camp for the British Army. The location was the village of Aldershot only two days walk south of Ivinghoe.

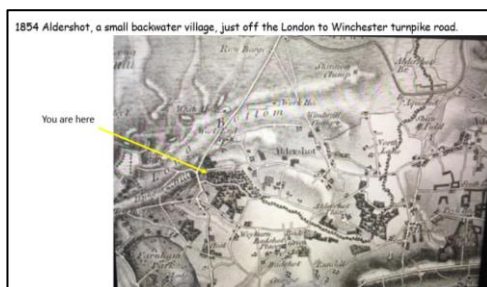
Let us now take a look at the origins of The Camp at Aldershot. We are now at the time of the Crimean War between Russia, and France and England



The period of relative world peace that was held in place following Waterloo, primarily by the superiority of the Royal Navy, finally ended with the commencement of the Crimean War in 1853. A war that saw England with its allies France, Turkey and Sardinia fight against the common enemy, Russia. (Similarities with today abound). This war finally ended in 1856, with soldiers returning to England, many injured and suffering from disease with what is now know as post-traumatic stress disorder, but at that time not all understood.

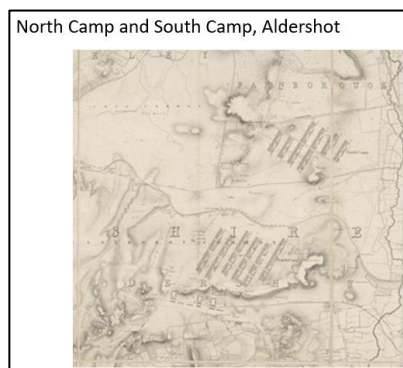
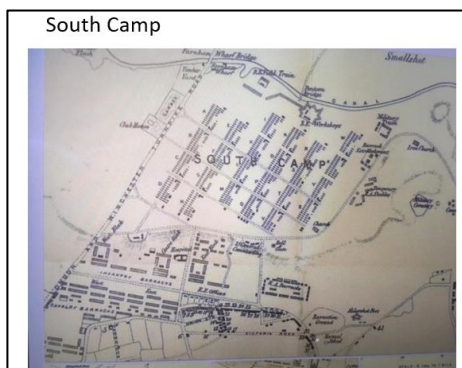
Somewhere had to be found to house both the returning soldiers and also the local Militias who were to congregate with the bulk of the Army. But where??? Two factors were dominant; the site had to be within a day's march of London in case of insurrection there, but also a day's march from the Royal Navy's base at Portsmouth in case those wily French decided to try their luck once again.

So, the British government, in 1854, agreed to the Commander in Chief of the Army, Lord Hardinge's recommendation to the purchase of over twenty-five thousand acres of land at Aldershot, selling at £12.00 an acre. The intention was to construct a camp for the British Army, being the first time that such a camp had ever been envisaged in England.

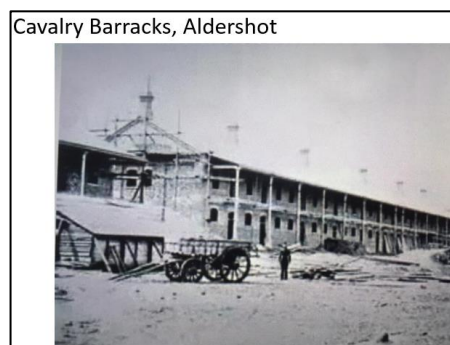
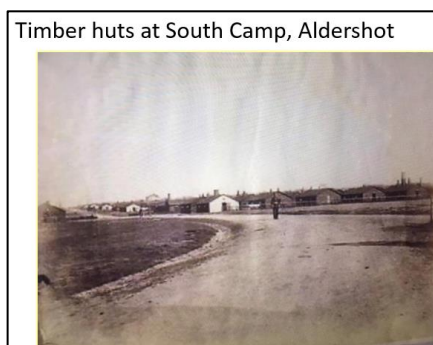


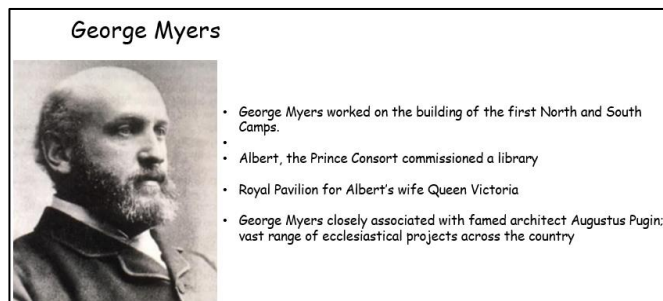
Aldershot, at this time, was a small backwater village or rather hamlet, just off the London to Winchester turnpike, on the edge of a vast area of heathland previously renowned for highwaymen. The Basingstoke Canal crossed the heathland, having been built by 1794 for the transportation of agricultural produce to London; but after this initial upheaval little else had changed. Then, suddenly, the quiet was disrupted by the sudden appearance of Royal Engineers who were to oversee the mass of men and materials descending on the village to build 'The Camp'.

The initial influxes of soldiers were housed in a vast township of canvass, sleeping and living in tents. Work commenced on the new permanent barracks in 1854 and being completed in 1859. In addition to the Camp, it was originally planned to build accommodation for the Militia battalions who flocked to the colours at the commencement of the war. Provision was made to house altogether some 20,000 men.



The first permanent buildings were eight hundred timber huts on brick foundations to house the soldiers, and an additional four hundred and sixty huts for officers' quarters, administrative offices, mess rooms, kitchens, hospitals etc. Although this was thought to be a temporary arrangement, the huts remained in occupation until eventually replaced by brick-built barrack blocks many years later. So, for the next thirty years the timber huts were the only accommodation for soldiers until they were eventually replaced in the 1890's. In fact, when the huts were taken down it was found that the foundations were still solid and had been very well built.





Taking charge of the initial building of The Camp was the renowned builder Mr George Myers. George Myers worked on the building of the first North and South Camps. Albert, Prince Consort, also commissioned him to build a library for the Army at Aldershot to his own requirements and a Royal Pavilion for his wife Queen Victoria. George Myers was closely associated with famed architect of that time Augustus Pugin, working on a vast range of ecclesiastical projects across the country. He was therefore a much sought after builder for major projects in the country at that time.

There is now an intriguing question posed; where were the numbers of men to come from required to undertake this vast building programme? Answers can be found, in part, from reports in local newspapers. For instance, in March 1854, the *Hampshire Chronicle* was reporting that handbills were being hastily distributed in Winchester. This was a call for five hundred labourers to come to Aldershot bringing their own picks and shovels.

Howard Cole records in his *Story of Aldershot*, one Isaac Lamb, a former farm labourer, working on the Camp at a rate of £1 per day whilst in his previous employment he had received 18 shillings a week

The competition for labour at this time was immense. England was not only continuing the Industrial Revolution but was also in the middle of a building boom. For instance, the population of London grew three-fold to just over 3 million between 1815 and 1860, to house the growing population as well as many immigrants. The railway boom continued seemingly unabated, to seemingly connect every town and city in the UK by railway, drawing in, not only Irish labourers, but also many others, to the lucrative Navy gangs working across the entire country. Locally the enormous building projects of the Portsmouth and Gosport Forts (later known as Palmerston Follies after the Prime Minister at that time Lord Palmerston), were being built due to the possibility (maybe imagined) of French invasion looming, went on unabated from 1860 until 1880, requiring a large workforce of both labourers and skilled workmen for the entire programme period.

(As an aside, if you are interested, one of the forts is open to the public, daily. Fort Nelson on Portsdown Hill Road, Portsmouth. It is owned by the Royal Armouries, is free to visit and is well worth the trip as the site is magnificent and the displays exceedingly good.)

Railway Navvies (The word 'navvy' came from the 'navigators' who built the first navigational canals in the 18th century, at the very dawn of the Industrial Revolution)



The Railway Boom



Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were taking a deep interest in the building of the Camp at Aldershot, visiting for the first time on 10th June 1855 to inspect the progress and then regularly staying at the then newly completed Royal Pavilion.

On the world stage there were momentous times, with the onset of the American Civil War in 1861. This had profound repercussions in England as trade especially of cotton for the mills in the north became scarcer. The Army of course kept a close eye on the progress of weaponry utilised, and even more the Royal Navy seeing for the first-time iron and steel ships in close combat. Of course England was not directly involved in this conflict, however many families had relations in the United States therefore news was closely watched in newspapers as well as British ships being involved in blockade running to outrun the Union warships in an effort to export cotton to the mills.

Henry Wells Moves to Aldershot

About 1855 - Henry and his bricklayer brother John Wells move to Aldershot



1861 census for Farnham, No 1 Prospect Cottages

John Wells (age 29) – Bricklayer

Hephzibah Wells (age 24) – wife of John Wells

Henry Wells (age 26) – Inn keeper (possibly White Hart Beer House)

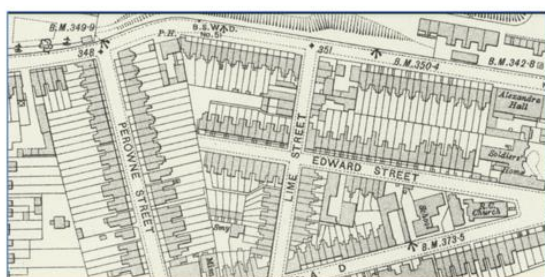
Elizabeth Wells (age 22) – wife of Henry Wells

1861 England Census for Henry Wells					
Household No.	Name	Age	Sex	Relationship	Occupation
112	John Wells	29	M	Head	Bricklayer
	Hephzibah Wells	24	F	Wife	
	Henry Wells	26	M	Brother	Inn Keeper
	Elizabeth Wells	22	F	Sister	

The 1861 census showed Henry Wells as residing in Farnham with his brother John, a bricklayer, and John's wife Hephzibah. Henry records in the census his occupation at this time was Inn Keeper, an occupation he appears to have maintained in a small way later. They appeared to have heard, from far away Ivinghoe, of this bonanza for employment, and made their way, possibly by foot over two days, from Ivinghoe to the Camp at Aldershot. It was recorded that Henry Wells had succeeded in obtaining a post as foreman on the newly built temporary railway with the builder George Myers. This appears quite remarkable in as much as Henry appeared to have no trade-training or experience. Therefore, in the turmoil of the vast construction site that was to become Aldershot, Henry must have stood out as somewhat exceptional amongst the labourers employed. As events turned out George Myles made a very shrewd decision to employ Henry, as later history will show.

It appears that Henry Wells may have understood the situation in Aldershot from the outset, as very soon in 1857, he has procured some land in the town and built himself two houses. These may well have been cottages in the newly formed Edward Street.

1857 Henry had procured some land and built himself two houses. These may well have been cottages in the newly formed Edward Street, Aldershot.




It is difficult for us, some 150 years later to be able to appreciate the enormity of the tasks presented to these newcomers to the village of Aldershot. Not only had they to build dwellings, but also to cut out the very roads to access their new homes, provide water and sanitation to the same, basically from what were fields or orchards. No one to dictate what was to be done, only obtain a license to build, just the urge to begin a new life in a new location. True pioneers?

Luckily, we have a brief record in Henry's own words in a newspaper interview later in his life, when he was asked about his beginnings in Aldershot.

The infantry barracks were commenced on 22nd 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 14th 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.

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

1860 Henry married Elizabeth Short, whose home was also in Ivinghoe. They were married at the East Street Chapel (Independents) in Farnham. He was a foreman on a railway line.



1860. Marriage solemnized at the East Street Chapel in the Parish of Farnham in the County of Surrey.		Name of Bride		Name of Bridegroom		Name of Minister		Name of Witnesses	
10	Henry Wells	25	years	Bachelor	Foreman on a Railway line	Richard Gordon	Henry Wells	Charles Short	Elizabeth Short
11	Elizabeth Short	24	years	Spinster		Farnham			

Marr'd in the East Street Chapel according to the Rites and Ceremonies of the Independents by Mr. J. Jenkins

The Marriage solemnized at the East Street Chapel in the Parish of Farnham in the County of Surrey

Henry Wells
Elizabeth Short

in the Presence of Mr. J. Jenkins
X The Clerk of the Peace

J. Jenkins
W. J. Jenkins
W. J. Jenkins

By 1860, Henry was obviously feeling financially much more secure, as on 24th June he married Elizabeth Short, whose home was in Ivinghoe. So, it appears they had been childhood sweethearts, and Henry had not forgotten her in his headlong rush to become someone of note in these booming times. They were married at the East Street Baptist Chapel (Independent) in Farnham.

It appears that Henry was well connected with the Baptist Church or rather the part of the Church known as the Particular rather than General. This required members to have undergone immersion at baptism, enabling them to take communion. Henry remained a staunch member of the Baptist Church throughout his life, attending the 'Little Chapel' at Hale, every Sunday and supporting the Baptist Church. In his obituary he is recorded as building the Baptist Chapel, but may well have donated finance and labour to provide the numerous extensions to the building during his 40 years attending.



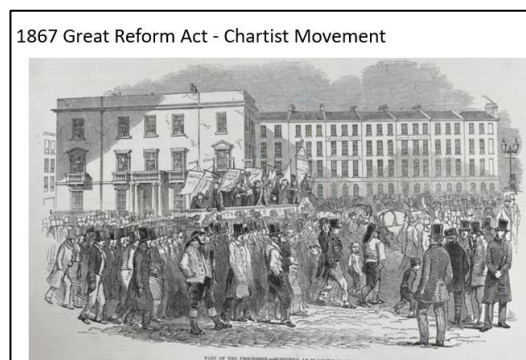
Henry's elder brother George had already been working successfully as a bricklayer in Aldershot. We find him in 1858 being baptised at Bethel Baptist Church in Farnham, and providing financial support to the church, which would indicate the family's observance to the Particular part of the Baptist Church. Henry, much later in life in 1895, was reported in the Rochdale Times to have donated 206 Ruby Bibles to the Hope Chapel in Rochdale to superintendents, teachers, and scholars, as a souvenir of his visit to the Hope Chapel Sunday School.

The links between Rochdale and Farnham appear to be connected through the Particular Baptist Denomination, as both at this time were centres for non-conformist religion. Baptists were particularly interested in promoting education, something that Henry took very much to heart later in his life.

Martin, Wells and Company

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 son 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 workers and 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 third son George, was born in 1868, but unfortunately succumbed to a childhood problem 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 as 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.

(Another aside. Napoleon III died in 1873 after fleeing France and settling in Chislehurst, Kent. His wife Empress Eugenie moved to the hamlet of Farnborough and built St Michael's Abbey where she and her husband are buried. Queen Victoria provided the sarcophagus.)

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, St Josephs 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 Church Street, with his growing family and more importantly stating his job as a builder.

1871 Henry (builder) and Elizabeth Wells in Church Street with children Alfred, Samuel, John and Lily

Brother John and Hephzibah living next door

1871 England Census for Henry Wells									
Hampshire - Aldershot - ALL - 5									
Church Street	1	Henry Wells	Head	Mar	38	Builder	Elizabeth Wells	Wife	31
		Elizabeth Wells	Wife	Mar	29		Henry Wells	Husband	38
		Alfred	Boys	9					
Church St	1	Samuel Wells	Boys	7		Builder	Elizabeth Wells	Wife	31
		John	Boys	5					
		Lily	Girls	1					
		Elizabeth	Girls	3					
		Hephzibah	Girls	1					

The opening, on 23rd 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 certainly demonstrating to all that he was not only a competent contractor amply demonstrated his 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 were 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. Although Aldershot already had a church, St Michaels, that had stood in the centre of the historic village for many hundreds of years, 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.

<p>MARTIN, WELLS, & Co., Ironmongers. OIL AND COLORMEN, TIMBER MERCHANTS, Builders & General Contractors WELLINGTON STREET, ALDERSHOT. REGS to call the attention of the Public to their large and varied Stocks of BAR AND SHEET IRON, Wrought and Cut Nails, Screws, Bolts, Horse Nails, Files and Rasps, Stoves and Bangs, Cutlery, Rain- water pipes, Gutterings, Gas and Water Pipes, Clocks, Plumbers' Fittings, Lead, Zinc, Brass, and Copper Goods, Builders' and other IRONMONGERY, AND BRASS WORK OF EVERY DESCRIPTION. Also the Largest Stock in Aldershot of Colors, White Lead, Oil, Turpentine Driers, Varnishes, Brushes, Window Glass, Polished and Silvered Plate, Stained and Enamelled Glass, Pumps and Fittings, Compo Pipes, &c., &c., &c. PAPER HANGINGS</p>	<p>Brickyards at Rowhills (Cranmore Lane)</p> <p>MARTIN, WELLS & CO. LTD., Head Office, Works, Showrooms VICTORIA ROAD, ALDERSHOT. Bridgford English Timber Yard: ROWHILLS, ALDERSHOT. CANAL WHARF Farabrook Road, ALDERSHOT London Office and Works: Branch Office and Works: 23, AUCKLAND STREET, Vauxhall, S.E. YORKTOWN, SURREY</p> <p>BUILDERS & GENERAL CONTRACTORS. STEAM JOINERY WORKS. BRICK & TILE MANUFACTURERS ENGLISH & FOREIGN TIMBER MERCHANTS. LOCKSMITHS AND BELLHANGERS. IRONMONGERS, FOUNDERS, AND SMITHS. GAS, WATER, AND MECHANICAL ENGINEERS. PLUMBERS, PAINTERS, & DECORATORS IN ALL BRANCHES Contractors for— IMPROVED WOOD BLOCK FLOORING. IMPROVED GRANOLITHIC PAVINGS.</p>
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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 15th 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 prisoners' rooms, an arms store for 3000 stands of arms (Martini-Henry rifles), Magazines, Officers' 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.

Henry Wells - Civic Leader

Henry was moving from the position of being purely a builder and starting to shoulder responsibilities for the town he was so actively engaged in building. On 15th April 1876 he is recorded for the first time as becoming a member of Aldershot Board of Health and Sanitary Authorities. He is reported as "although being a new hand proved himself, in connection with the school board, to be well acquainted with the management of public business".

At a meeting of the Local Board of Health on June 10th 1876 Henry is already making his voice heard representing the residents of Aldershot. He is reported to have questioned the reason why Aldershot did not have a Stipendiary Magistrate and resident Magistrate's Clerk, instead of residents having to travel to Odiham for a Magistrate's Court hearing.

In 1878 Henry is recorded as living in Edward Street, in probably one of the new houses he has recently built.

Henry's opinions however were not always greeted with agreement, as illustrated in a letter to the *Sheldrake Military Gazette* October 12 1878. A Mr. H Dougherty challenged the Local Board especially Henry Wells as having told the complainant to "go away" and not "to turn the place upside down by barking like a dog in the street". It appears that Henry was somewhat more forthright than some expected.

It was not all plain sailing for Henry as an owner. There are numerous reports in the press of proceedings at the local Magistrate's Court where employees and others are brought in front of the Magistrates to answer for a multitude of minor offences, primarily theft, from both Martin, Wells and Company but also from the Army who were often the client for the works being undertaken. Often the sentence incurred included Hard Labour as part of the eventual sentence.

1877 Police Constable Mayne apprehending John Wiseman



An example was reported in the local press that a Police Constable Mayne stated, in Court, that at 5pm on 20th November 1877, he had observed the prisoner John Wiseman, leaving North Camp with a pot of paint. He followed at a distance and then asked him where he had obtained the paint.

In answer to several questions, it was ascertained that he worked for Martin, Wells and Company and was going to work at North Camp the following morning. The prisoner was then taken to the station on suspicion of stealing the paint. Upon arrival at the station Mr Wells was there. The prisoner then stated that in fact he was going to use the paint for himself. He has worked for Mr Wells for 3 years and had borne good character. The Magistrates sentenced the prisoner to three weeks imprisonment with hard labour.

That Henry Wells had incorporated his company of Martin, Wells and Company into the essence of the town of Aldershot is illustrated at the meeting of the Local Board of Health September 20th 1879. Here tenders for the lighting, paving, channelling and generally making of roads in the district were discussed. It was agreed that though Martin, Wells and Company's tender was not necessarily the lowest, their tender should be accepted as the firm employed hundreds of men and contributed largely to the rates, whereas if the money went out of the town nothing further would be thought about it.

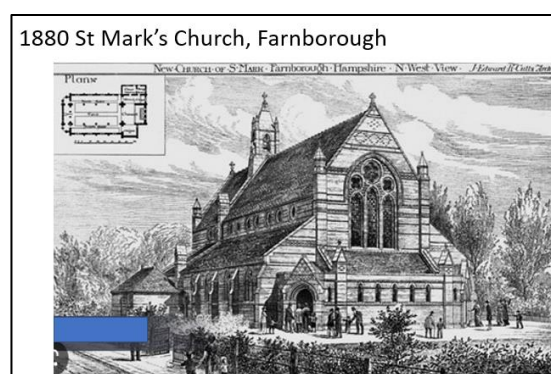


During 1879 Martin, Wells and company undertook a very large and prestigious building project that can still be seen today, the Cambridge Hospital in Aldershot. The hospital design was based upon that of the Royal Herbert Hospital in Woolwich and is of a grand scale and design, built at a cost of £45,758. The design of the building appeared to follow the design principles established by Florence Nightingale following her experiences in the Crimean War. The main central block had a central corridor stretching 528 feet (161 metres) with medical wards of both sides and on two floors offering tall windows to provide lighting and air circulation. The building was heated to give a constant temperature. It was named after Prince George, Duke of Connaught and Cambridge, a cousin of Queen Victoria and commander in Chief of the Army.

In an address to the 24th Regiment at their departure to Zululand on March 1st 1879, Henry, as Chairman of the Aldershot Board of Health, expressed the town's admiration of the regiment, wishing them success in their forthcoming campaigns.

Later in April the same year Henry was elected to the Local Board of Health. This Board was responsible for such issues as unsanitary dwellings, emissions, sewers, street cleaning and paving, water supply, public lavatories, and burials. This role would bring Henry into the many aspects of running a fast-developing town.

The following year in April 1880 Henry Wells again stood for the position of member on the Aldershot Board of Health. As predicted prior to the election, Henry romped home and was elected together with Mr Lazareck. Henry is fast making his way into the hierarchy of Aldershot society. However, his reasons were not purely ego enhancing or profit making. Henry was a steadfast church member and he proved over and over again in his life that he was deeply committed to helping his fellow man.



The following year, on 26th July 1880, Edward Martin in company with Henry and his brother George Wells attended the laying of the foundation stone by the Duchess of Connaught accompanied by her husband Prince Arthur, the Duke of Connaught, for the new St. Marks Church in Farnborough, where Martin, Wells and Company were again the builders. They had entered into a contract on 10th May to build a chancel and nave to accommodate 370 persons at a cost of £2000. As was normal with such events at this time, the ceremony was followed by a luncheon provided in a large marquee where their Royal Highnesses were accompanied by 200 ladies and gentlemen in-waiting and the principal gentry of the surrounding neighborhood. Henry was most certainly at the pinnacle of local gentry having become the most sought-after builder for projects in the fast-growing Aldershot areas, and rubbing shoulders with royalty, gentry and all and sundry who really mattered.

With Aldershot expanding and gradually becoming a town, moves were afoot to incorporate outlying areas into the town's sphere of influence. However not all inhabitants agreed with this idea. Henry Wells certainly made his point in a letter to the *Sheldrake's Military Gazette* stating that Aldershot ratepayers should not be called upon to fund improvements to draining and paving of streets in the parish of Farnborough or North Camp, by the incorporation of those areas, this should be the responsibility of persons living in that area.

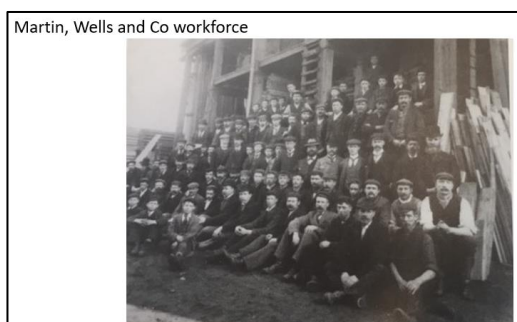
Henry was fast pursuing many different aspects of life in Aldershot. In May 1881 the Aldershot Local Board of Health proposed that he should become chairman the next year. He had already taken the role in 1877 in the absence of its then chairman Mr Clinton. So, he was recognised as a force that was helping the community for the better.

Henry's interest in licensed premises appears to have continued despite becoming a major building contractor. In September 1881 a Mr Eve applied for a license to operate an off-licence in Edward Street on behalf of Henry Wells. After some discussion in the Aldershot Petty Sessions, it was agreed to issue the licence.

The care Henry showed for his workforce is demonstrated in September 1881 where a coroners report showed that a carpenter in the employ of Martin, Wells and Company, had a fall and died, due to being struck by a scaffolding pole. Henry Wells is reported as paying for the funeral and allowing his entire workforce to attend.

By 1882, Henry had become the Chairman of the Aldershot Board of Health, after only a couple of years serving as a member. He was showing his prowess in many aspects of both business and civic life, believing in his ideals for the future of the town.

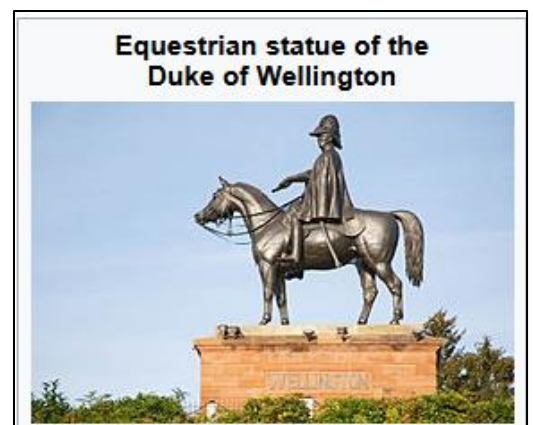
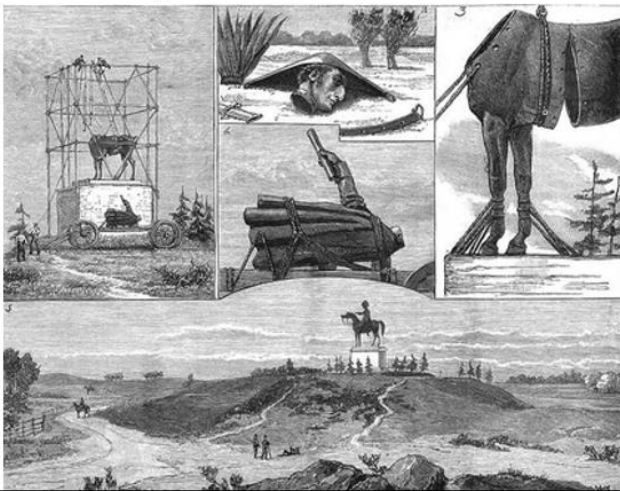
Not all was work for the Wells family and employees as shown in the *Farnham Herald* of Saturday June 24th 1882, where a cricket match between team from Martin, Wells and Company were playing at the Recreation Ground in the High Street. One team was headed by Henry's eldest son Alfred, then 20 years, and the other team comprised of company carpenters. Inevitably the match was followed by the essential evening dinner, this time at the Cannon Hotel.



On a stormy and wet Saturday 15th July 1882, the entire 80 branches of Martin, Wells and Company employees set out on the very first General Outing, (called a Bean Feast in the local paper.) They embarked by a Southwestern Railway train from Aldershot Town Station to Portsmouth. Upon arrival at Portsmouth the happy band divided into groups, some entering the dockyard to view the warships, others intent on beach activities whilst the remainder set out on a sea voyage to Ryde on the Isle of Wight. The party sat for dinner at Cawte's Hotel at Southsea. Henry Wells provided a 'handsome contribution' to the excursion fund but was unable to attend himself as he has a prior engagement having to be at Swanley, Kent for the laying of a corner stone for the new Home for Little Boys. Although no evidence can be found, it would appear that Henry Wells may well have been involved in the construction the Home, that was eventually opened by the Prince (later Edward VII) and Princess of Wales.

The following week saw the opening of the Aldershot Brewery built for the owner Mr Sheldrake by Martin, Wells and Company. The brewery was situated close to the town's railway station. As was common at the time, the official opening was followed by a substantial luncheon at the nearby South Western Hotel in, appropriately, The Malt Room. Needless to say, Henry was one of the guests.

1885 Duke of Wellington statue moved from Hyde Park to Aldershot



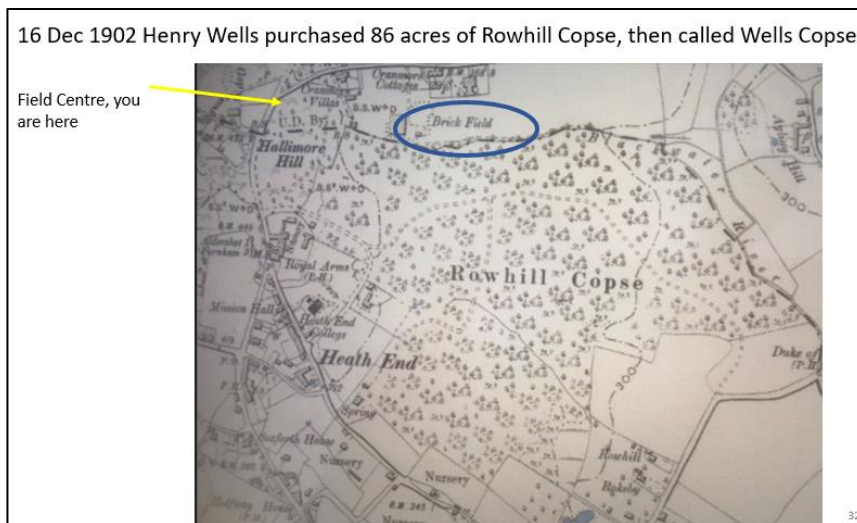
The year 1885 brought another major contract for Martin, Wells and Company allowing Henry to rub shoulders with not only the aristocracy and gentry but also the Royal Family. To understand the significance of this significant event we need to go back in time a little. To commemorate the victorious general 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 any statue but the largest equestrian statue in England, with a length nose to tail of 26ft (8 metres), weighing 40 tons (36287 kilos). However, all was not well with this statues location as it was out of proportion with its location. (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.

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 by the Army. So, Henry has landed well and truly on his feet and established himself amongst the gentry present.

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.

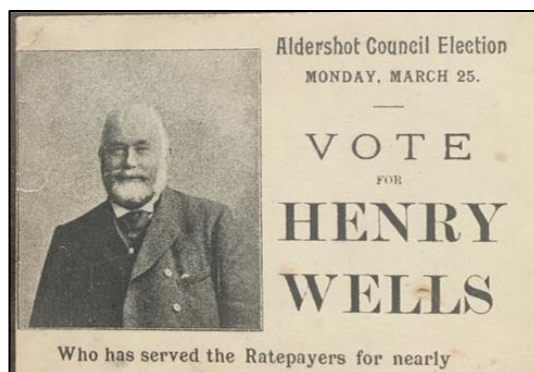
18th April 1885 brought a significant change to the business relationships for Henry Wells when his partner Edward Martin passed away. Edward had been ailing throughout the winter and died at the age of 63 years, leaving a son and daughter. From this time on Henry was essentially a sole agent.

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.



During the 1890's 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 1960's. To provide the bricks for this major redevelopment Henry rented clay pits adjacent to Rowhill Copse 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 brickfields 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 3rd 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 inhabitant 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 on the left, Thomas Jerome, surveyor and Henry Wells on the right



At the June 26 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 is 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 Marriage of Florence Elizabeth Wells to Frederick John Lloyd



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.

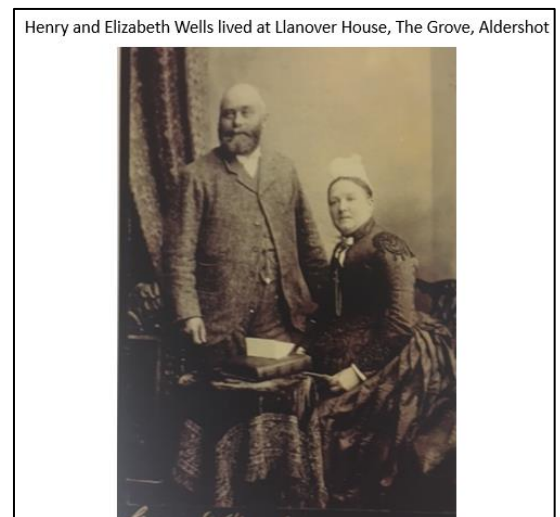
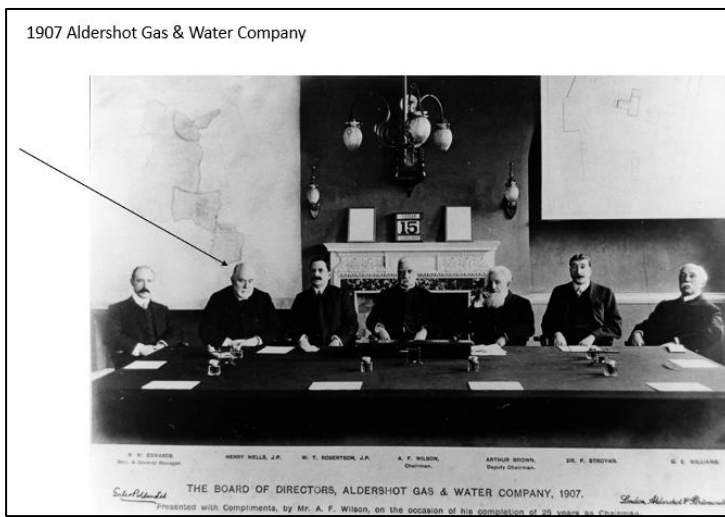
In the same year Henry was Vice Chairman of the Farnham and Aldershot Board of Guardians when they agreed to the erection of a new infirmary for the Farnham Workhouse, and to seek sanction from the Local Government Board without delay.

1902 purchase of 86 acres of Rowhills Copse for £7500

RECITING seisen of sd Edwd Over of hereditis and premes thrinar described and agreement for sale.
IT WAS WITNESSED that in conson of the sum of £7500 as purchase money on or before etc. paid by the sd Henry Wells to the sd Edward Over (receipt acknowledged) the said Edward Over as Beneficial Owner thereby conveyed unto the said Henry Wells
ALL THAT estate pieces or parcels of land (part of the Rowhills Estate) comprising about 86 acres 1 rood and 17 perches of woodland and pasture situate (between Heath End and Weybourne and the Parish of Aldershot) in the Parish of Farnham in the County of Surrey and more particularly

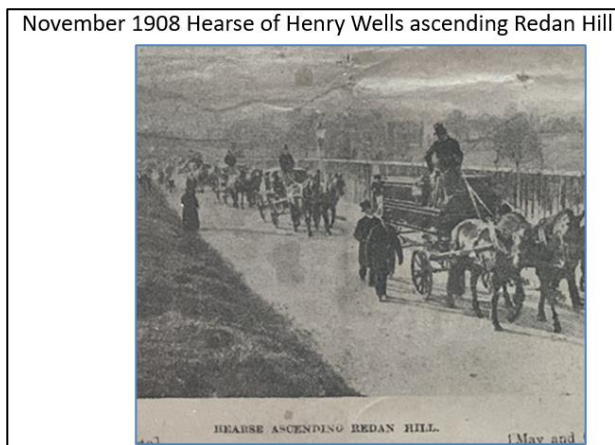
ROWHILL'S BRICKYARD,
Lower Farnham-road, Aldershot (one Mile
Aldershot Station).
MR. W. G. WOOD
Will sell by Auction on the above premises,
by kind permission of Mr. Henry Wells, on
FRIDAY, AUGUST 31st, 1906,
at 3 p.m. promptly, a
STEAM ROAD ROLLER
(new 1904)
HAND CRANE
and
BOX TRUCK.
The Roller will be under steam, and can be
inspected on the morning of sale, between
11 and 1 o'clock.

In 1902 Henry purchased Rowhill Copse and associated roads, land that he had previously rented for the extraction of clay for bricks. This was his major legacy for his family, 86 acres for £7500. 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.



The Funeral and Obituaries

Henry Wells passed away on 6th November 1908 at the age of 73, after a long illness. His funeral 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.

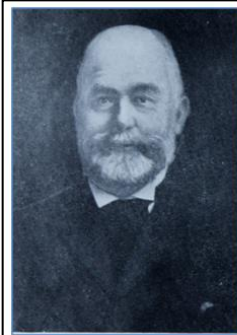
A view of his character and demeanor can be grasped from Obituary Notices published in local papers where it was stated:

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 of one employee to conduct services that he himself was incapable 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.

He 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, for from dealing with contracts for hundreds of pounds, in the end it was not 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

1835 - 1908

County Councillor
Justice of the Peace
Chairman of the Health Board
Member of the Gas and Water Board
Overseer for the Poor Rate (Board of Guardians)
Devoted member of the Baptist Church
Owner of Martin, Wells and Co Ltd