

THE RUSSELL FAMILY

Although the papers in the Surrey History Centre¹ are quite detailed about the early history of the land, they tell us nothing of the later owners or occupiers and indeed it is only from the land registry documents that I know that David Goliath Bayliss and Ethel Marion Strudwick sold the property to John William Gunning in February 1960.

My 1968 Street Directory lists a 'M.J. Harris' at 166, with 'M.W.J. Hale' in 1964 (possibly tenants), but I suspect there must have been at least one or two other occupants/owners between the 1960's and the mid 1980's.

Before Gunning (who I shall return to in a later article) the property was evidently the home of the Russell family, 'Mrs F.S. Russell' recorded in my street directory of 1957, and then 'A.C. Russell' in 1948 all the way back to 'A. Russell' in 1919.

The electoral registers (at the Surrey History Centre) confirmed that Florence S. Russell was the occupier of 166 in 1960² (nobody being registered here in 1961), and by going back through the years I was able to see that 1947³ was the first year she was here on her own - her husband, Alfred Charles Russell, as I later found out, having died on the 3rd January 1947⁴.

Through the electoral registers I could trace the Russell's back to 1918⁵ (when Florence was first eligible to vote in both parliamentary and local government elections) - although it is worth noting that beside Alfred's name is a letter 'a' indicating that he was at that stage 'absent'.

Between the wars this area had been part of the Farnham Constituency, the Woking Parliamentary seat not being created until 1949.

Before 1918 we were part of the North Western Surrey Division where we find just Alfred Russell listed in 1915⁶ (there being no elections, and therefore no new registers, between then and the end of the war).

Unfortunately the register for 1914⁷ is the last that lists most voters in order of their address, so that from 1913⁸ backwards I had to trawl through the alphabetical lists to find the occupiers of the property.

1914 was also the first year that most of the houses in the High Street were numbered, so going back to 1913, I was lucky to find Alfred Russell at '4 Butts Cottages, Woking Village', and luckier still to find him at that address all the way back to 1910⁹.

As I shall explain in my article on the other Butts Cottages, 1910 was the first time that what is now 170 & 172 High Street were recorded, with our house (and the two on either side) evidently being first occupied by the time the 1909¹⁰ electoral register was drawn up.

Unfortunately in 1909 I found Alfred Russell not at 4 Butt's Cottages, but at 2 Prior's Croft - so I had to look through the whole list to identify a James Pullen as the occupier (probably the first occupier) of our home.

I haven't been able to positively identify anything about Mr Pullen - a common local name, with several James' listed in this area both before and since 1909 (although I shall speculate about his identity in the article on Clamps Cottages).

So, having gone back as far as I could in the registers, I decided to head forward again, and see what I could find out about the Russell's (although in order to do that I actually started by going even further back, to see where exactly they came from).

It turned out that both Florence and Alfred were fairly local, as the first reference I could find for Alfred Charles Russell was from the 1881 census¹¹ when aged nine he was listed with three sisters (Helen, 13; Kate, 11; and Love, 5) and two older brothers (William, 21; and Ernest, 15). They were all living at Shackelford, Old Woking, with their parents, James Russell (55), a labourer at the paper mills and Sarah (50) a 'rag sorter' at the same place.

The next item came from the parish registers at St Peter's Church in Old Woking¹², where Alfred and his sisters were all baptised on the 16th December 1883 (the register noting Love's middle name as 'Ann'). Why James and Sarah had waited so long for the four to be baptised I have no idea - I think it must have been fairly unusual for that time.



166 High Street, Old Woking (during our 'Green' phase in the 1990's) – Home of the Russell family from before the Great War until Florence's death in 1960.

¹ SHC 3468/4

² SHC CC802/71/10

³ SHC CC802/58/5

⁴ National Probate Register

⁵ SHC CC802/27/4

⁶ SHC CC802/26/4

⁷ SHC CC802/25/4

⁸ ibid

⁹ SHC CC802/21/4

¹⁰ SHC CC802/20/4

¹¹ TNA RG11/772/69/11

¹² SHC WOKP/2/4

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As for our Florence Sarah, she was baptised at Send¹³ on the 24th February 1878, the daughter of Charles Smith (a sawyer) and Emily, who according to the 1881 census¹⁴ lived at Send Heath.

Neither baptism registers list their dates of birth, but the register of their marriage, at St Mary's in Send¹⁵ on the 16th April 1898, does and from this we can see that Alfred was born on the 17th January 1872, with Florence Sarah on the 14th November 1877 - although the marriage register does rather confuse things by stating that Alfred was 25 rather than 26!

I should have mentioned that in the 1891 census¹⁶ Alfred, then aged 20, was listed as a 'farm labourer' living with his parents and the rest of his family in Church Street, but at the time of his marriage his occupation had changed to that of 'plasterer', with his brother, Ernest, signing as one of the witnesses along with Florence's sister, Emily Smith.

Their first child, named Alfred Charles, was born on the 20th February 1899 and baptised at St Peter's, Old Woking¹⁷, on the 25th June 1899, with their second son, Ernest James (named after his uncle and grandfather perhaps), born on the 30th May 1900 and baptised on the 24th March 1901 at St Peter's¹⁸.

In the register for Alfred Charles junior, the place of abode for the family is listed as 'Westfield, Woking', whilst for Ernest James' it is 'The Village, Woking'. Alfred Charles senior is listed as a plasterer on both (as he was on his marriage certificate).

In the 1901 census¹⁹, taken on the 1st April, Alfred Russell is recorded with Florence, Alfred and Ernest as living at a property in Priors Croft in Old Woking, but for some reason his occupation is not listed.

On the 27th July 1902 a third son, Jack, was baptised in St Peter's, Old Woking²⁰, but I have not been able to find out exactly when he was born. Alfred Russell is still recorded as a plasterer and the place of abode is 'Village, Woking'.

Between 1902 and 1911, I have not been able to find anything else on the family (apart from the electoral registers), so that the next record I have is from the census that year when all five can be found at 4 Butts Cottages²¹.

The census shows that the property had five habitable rooms, with presumably all three upstairs rooms then being bedrooms.

When we extended the kitchen, there was evidence in the layout of the drains and bricked-up openings in the wall, that the back section had once been a downstairs toilet (accessed from outside), with the remainder of the space probably being a small 'scullery' (neither of which were to be counted as rooms in the census), with probably the kitchen in what is now our living room.

The records show that in the twelve years of marriage the couple had had three children, all of whom were still alive.

This is significant as the next entry I have for the Russell family is from the Old Woking Midwives Register²². It records that Mrs Russell had four previous labours (so presumably there was at one stage between 1911 and 1917 another child or possibly a miscarriage).

The Midwives Register records that she gave birth to a 'living male' in the early hours of the 4th July 1917. This is evidently Leslie Ronald Russell (who we shall return to later).

No.	Date of certificate	Name and Address of Patient.	No. of previous Labours and Miscarriages.	Age.	Date and hour of Midwife's Arrival.	Date and hour of Child's Birth.	Appearance.	Direction of Cervix, Size, and Stage of Labour.	Completion (if any) during or after Labour.	Sex of child, Date, Time, or Place of Birth.	Full name or Signature of Midwife.	L. Doctor sent for: Name of Doctor.	Date of Birth: Day, Month, Year.	Condition of Mother from: Day, Month, Year.	Condition of Child from: Day, Month, Year.	REMARKS*
44	August	Mrs Russell 166 High St. Old Woking	4	41	July 4 th 1917 5.5 a.m.	July 4 th 1917 5.10 a.m.	1 lb 10 ^{oz} 10 ^{oz} 2 ^{oz} 2 lb 3 ^{oz}	Normal	Normal	Living Full Term.	Swain		July 13 th 1917.	Normal. Pulse & Temperature	Living Breast- Fed.	M. Swain - 19.7.17

We know what it was like to have three teenagers in the house, but to also have a baby here as well - no wonder Alfred Charles is recorded as 'absent' in the electoral register for 1918!

I wonder whether he was in the forces at the time (although I haven't found anything yet, and indeed the only wartime reference I can find for Alfred is in the local newspaper²³ when he was fined 2s.6d., for cycling with no rear light in January 1917), but I did find that the sons Ernest and Jack signed up in 1920 for the Queens Royal West Surrey Regiment²⁴, by which time Ernest was a 'baker's roundsman' by trade and Jack a 'carter'.

Alfred Charles junior evidently did not enlist, but we know from the electoral register of 1920 that he was still resident at 166 High Street²⁵ (his father being then listed as Alfred Charles senr).

Looking at the 1921 register²⁶ I briefly got confused as along with our Alfred Charles' at 166 there was also one across the road at 173 High Street (in the spring list) and at 3 Church Cottages in Church Street (in the autumn list).

¹³ SHC SEN/4/2

¹⁴ TNA RG11/774/7/8

¹⁵ SHC SEN/2/7

¹⁶ THA RG12/555/87/8

¹⁷ SHC WOKP/2/5

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ TNA RG13/597/14/19

²⁰ SHC WOKP/2/5

²¹ TNA RG14/3037/147

²² See the ARCHIVE section of this site, under OLD WOKING, ITEMS RELATING TO LOCAL ORGANISATIONS, 1914-18 Old Woking Midwives Register

²³ Surrey Advertiser, Wednesday 3rd January 1917, page 3

²⁴ SHC 7791/1/1/12

²⁵ SHC CC802/30/4

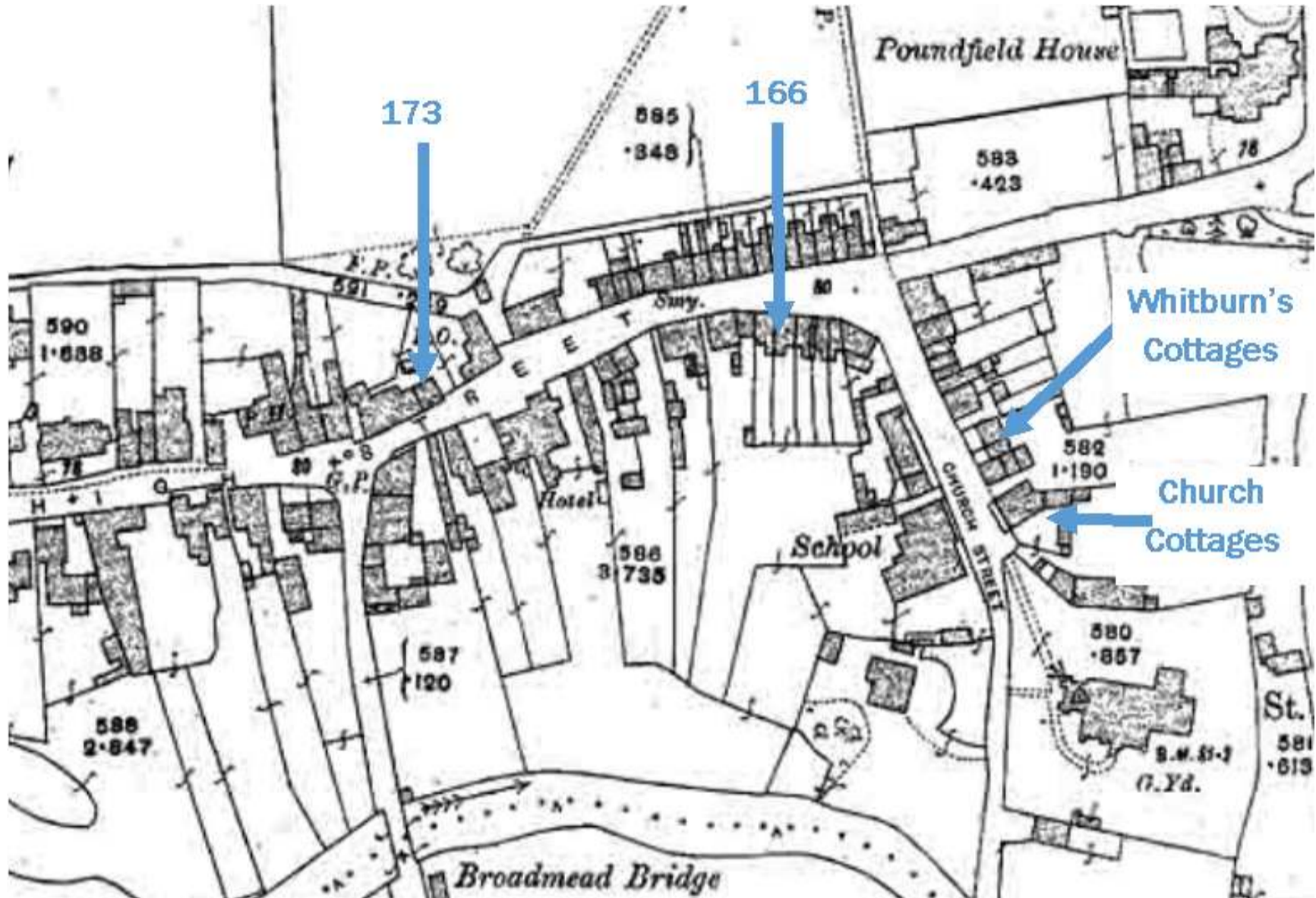
²⁶ SHC CC802/31/4

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Then I discovered that Alfred's elder brothers both had sons named Alfred (after their uncle?), with William's being born in 1896²⁷ and Ernest's in 1899²⁸!

I may look in more detail at the wider Russell family in another article, but for now it seems that the three Alfred Russells remained in Old Woking until 1923²⁹, when our 'junior' moved out (to where I do not know) - and Ernest and Jack (who were now able to vote) were evidently back from service.

Again I cannot be certain, but in the autumn of 1925 the electoral register³⁰ lists the four Russells at 166 High Street, the nephew Alfred Charles still at Church Cottages, and an Alfred Charles Russell at 1 Whitburn's Cottages in Church Street. Unless there is yet another Alfred Charles Russell, I suspect that our Alfred junior couldn't stay away from Old Woking for long.



By the spring of 1926³¹ Ernest had evidently also moved out, being married on the 19th December 1925 at St Mary of Bethany, Woking, to Rachel Louisa Churchill,³² followed by Jack's marriage in January 1926 to Florence Ivy Knights at St Peter's Church³³.

The parish registers give the address of both the bride and groom as 166 High Street - with Florence's father, Benjamin William Knight being also listed as a 'Carman' along with Jack Russell. The witnesses were Alfred Russell and an Emily Flippard, the register being signed by the Vicar of Send.

Jack is still on the electoral register in the autumn that year³⁴ at 166, but had moved out by the following year³⁵ when Alfred senior, Florence (and presumably Leslie Ronald) appear to have had the house to themselves.

They seem to remain quietly at 166 until 1939 when Leslie Ronald is erroneously recorded as 'Donald Leslie' in the electoral register³⁶ (for the first, and last, time).

He is also listed at the house in the register compiled in 1939 for the National Identity Card scheme³⁷, where his occupation is recorded as a 'Stores Clerk (Electrical)' - with his mother listed as doing 'unpaid domestic duties' and his father still employed as a plasterer.

The next reference to Leslie is in October 1941 when he married Margaret Lucy Bullmore, who a couple of years later is recorded at 'Walland Cottage, Chobham Road, Woking'. Sadly this was when Leslie was killed in action upon HMS Hebe on the 22nd November 1943³⁸.

²⁷ SHC WOKP/2/5

²⁸ *ibid*

²⁹ SHC CC802/37/4

³⁰ SHC CC802/41/4

³¹ SHC CC802/42/4

³² SHC 9033/2/8

³³ SHC 7692/1/4

³⁴ SHC CC802/43/4

³⁵ SHC CC802/44/4

³⁶ SHC CC802/56/4

³⁷ TNA RG101/1933E

³⁸ TNA ADM104/136

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Hebe was a 'Halcyon Class Minesweeper', which struck a mine off Bari in the Mediterranean. Apparently the 'explosion was abreast the bulkhead between the boiler rooms on the port side, followed by a second explosion near the same place. She capsized within four minutes of the first explosion' with the loss of at least 37 members of crew (some reports say 38 or 39).³⁹

Able Seaman Russell (and his comrades) are commemorated on the Naval Memorial at Portsmouth.



Sadly his father passed away just over three years later, on the 3rd January 1947 (leaving £696.4s.5d., to his wife) with Florence living as a widow until 1960, when she appears to have left 166 High Street and moved in with Jack Russell at his home at 40 Vale Farm Road, Woking – where she died on the 9th August that year leaving £1,342.8s.2d., to Ernest James Russell, a carter, and Jack Russell, a bread roundsman.

With the passing of Florence, it seems like the end of an era, and although there were evidently a number of occupier's between the Russell's and ourselves (twenty-seven years later), I think it is appropriate that this part of the story ends here.

Like the four Russell boys, our three girls all grew up and eventually left home - one just around the corner to St George's Cottage, Church Street, before renting 168 next door to us (until April 2021)!

So it seems appropriate that for the next article I should look at the predecessors of her old home – 3 Butt's Cottages.

³⁹ http://www.halcyon-class.co.uk/hebe/hms_hebe.htm (retrieved 1st April 2021)