

Int Molinology 2020,101:10-21

An English country millwright at the beginning of the 20th century: Thompson & Son of Alford in Lincolnshire

Colin Moore

This paper is the continuation of the history of Thompson's of Alford whose beginnings were published in International Molinology No 97, December 2018. It covers the period from 1900 to the death of Robert (Senior) on 5 January 1933. The research for this paper has revealed more information about the earlier years – specifically the site in Parsons Lane and Robert's marriages. The previous owner of the business was Edward Wheatcroft who used 'Hamilton Place' as its address. Hamilton Place and Parson's Lane are parallel roads and Wheatcroft owned the site between the two with the workshops fronting on Parson's Lane and his house fronting onto Hamilton Place; after acquiring the business Robert changed the address to Parson's Lane. The Ordnance Survey 25in map of 1887 shows that the Hamilton Place area had been separated from the millwrighting site, which includes a house. This is the plot Robert bought so he lived and worked from the Parson's Lane site from the beginning.

It was to this house he brought his first wife, Elizabeth, with whom he had four children; Ernest Francis, Harry, John Edgar and Amelia. Elizabeth died on 10 April 1889 and he married his second wife, Mary Elizabeth, on 16 March 1892 and it was to her that Robert, junior, was born on 18 December 1896. Very sadly, she died only 13 days later on 31 December and Robert registered the birth and death on 1 January 1897. The Registrar actually recorded "Mary Elizabeth (deceased)" on Robert's birth certificate. On the 11 January 1900, he married his third and last wife, Annie, with whom he had no children.

This paper is based on the ledgers, books and miscellaneous documents carefully kept over the years by

the two families who owned R Thompson & Son, Millwrights of Alford. It is with the kind permission of Tom Davies, the last owner, who retired in 2015 (thus closing the business), that all this information was made available for digital copying. The ledgers and copies are now in safe keeping with Alford & District Civic Trust at Alford Manor House to whom Tom has also donated the entire contents of his workshop. The museum already has a room dedicated to Thompson's and millwrighting and it is their intention over the coming years to recreate the workshop in a separate building.

Additional information has been obtained from army records and the census for 1901, which shows the household in Parson's Lane consisted of Robert, 45; his wife Annie, 48; Harry, 20, "student in training college"; John Edgar (Jack) 16, apprentice millwright; Amelia, 14, with no stated occupation; Robert junior (Bob), 4, not yet attending a school and Emma Blades, 17, a general servant. Ernest Francis, the eldest son, had become an assistant master at Wesleyan Temperance School in East Bridgeford in Nottingham. Three doors away, lived Thomas Hargreaves, a millwright's labourer, working for Robert and in Hamilton Place lived William Henry Quince, millwright, also working for Robert. Fig. 1 shows wages paid¹ in 1901 where the skilled millwright has a basic wage of 26 shillings, labourers, 18s and Jack, the 16-year-old apprentice, 3s.

The working week was long! Jack remembered this in later life and says in a letter to Rex Wailes (dated 11 March 1968) "we used to stay at mills from Monday to Saturday from 6.00 a.m to six p.m then two hours overtime when

Date	Name	Wage	Total
14/1/01	Brought Forward	65 13 0	
Jan 26	W. Quince	26/ 1 6 0	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
Feb 2	W. Quince	26/ 1 0 0	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 1 7 0	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
	W. Quince	26/ 1 5 6	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 1 4 0	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
	J. Hargreaves	18/ 7 6	
Mar 2	W. Quince	26/ 1 10 9	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 10	
	J. Hargreaves	18/ 7 8	
	J. E. Brown	18/ 6 0	
	W. Quince	26/ 1 10 6	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 9	
	Carried Forward	£76 18 0	
1901	Brought Forward	£76 18 0	
Jan 16	W. Quince	26/ 1 6 0	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
	W. Quince	26/ 1 6 0	
	J. E. Brown	18/ 12 0	
	J. E. Brown	18/ 12 6	
	W. Quince	26/ 1 6 9	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 2	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
Apr 6	W. Quince	26/ 1 2 0	
	J. E. Brown	18/ 3 0	
	W. Quince	26/ 17 4	
	J. E. Thompson	3/ 3 0	
	J. E. Brown	18/ 3 4	
	W. Quince	26/ 17 4	
	J. E. Brown	18/ 10 0	
	Carried Forward	£869 5	

Fig. 1. Wages Book, 1899-1950. Wages paid January to April 1901.