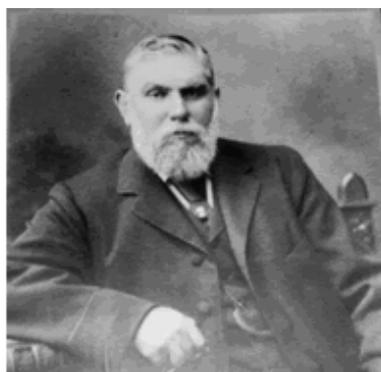


Beckingham cum Saundby

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Watson Family ...



The Watson family, owners of **Beckingham Shipyard**, were generous benefactors to the village with the community continuing to benefit from their philanthropy to this day. Joseph Spencer Compton Watson was born in Westbury, Wilts., the son of a Congregational Minister. He was educated at the City of London School and afterwards at Clevedon, Reading.

He began his business career at Reading Ironworks moving to Samuda's Shipyard, Isle of Dogs, where he got his first experience of ship building before going on to the Thames Ironworks in Bow Creek. After some engineering experience he began building barges at his own yard on Hercules Wharf, Poplar in 1869.

By the end of the 19th century, shipbuilding had shifted from timber to iron, London's naval yards were in decline, but private yards, of which there had always been many, were prospering. Before the financial Crash of 1866, from which London's shipbuilding industry never recovered, there were about 15,000 men and boys employed in shipbuilding on the Isle of Dogs alone. The social effects of the Crash worsened when the naval dockyards closed in 1869. Parts of the industry endured through the 20th century in more modest form, principally through ship repair and barge building

For reasons which are unclear he decided to bring his business to the Trent, possibly influenced by the decline in shipbuilding on the Thames. Mr Watson's sister lived in Willingham which may also have influenced his move. He was unsuccessful in finding suitable land on the Gainsborough side of the river and eventually purchased a small area of land in Beckingham Parish. He moved his yard here in 1889, bringing both equipment and some of his workforce from Blackwall and possibly from Fulham. Joseph or "Spen" as he was popularly known, lived with his wife Cornelia Jessie, whom he married in 1871, in The Chestnuts, Low Street for a short while before moving into Orchard House as well as the shipyard and offices Mr Watson built several houses for his workers, four near the yard, one on the yard, two on Trent bank next to the Crown Farm (once the Crown public house) opposite Lord Street, Gainsborough, all now demolished. He also built four houses on the High Street on land adjoining Orchard House and six on Trent Road past the Railway crossing.



He was deeply concerned with Education and Housing matters and he, along with other members of his family, took an active and keen interest in the life of the village. As well as donating land for a village school to be built in 1901 for 150 children, they built the **Village Institute** and houses in 1908, which provided Library, Reading Room and café. Billiard tables were added later. There was a bowling green and quoits pitch at the rear of the garden, these have since been converted to allotments which are rented out. The village still benefits from the Institute although there is no longer a café and the facilities have changed. Mr Watson was a Justice of the Peace for the county of Notts, and was for some time a member of the Gainsborough Board of Guardians. He was a staunch Congregationalist and took a very active part in the building of the Robinson Memorial Church, but his generosity was by no means confined to one section of the church.

He took a special interest in missionary enterprise abroad. He was a good master and never regarded his employees as mere "hands" but interested himself in their personal welfare as the many letters which were received by his widow testified on his death at the age of 72 years on 30th August 1917. He was interred in Willingham cemetery, his funeral being attended by many of his employees who had

been at the shipyard for over twenty years, some from the start. Much reference was made to his kindness and generosity. It may be of interest that Mr Watson's maternal Grandfather gave the first donation towards the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Mrs Cornelia Jessie Watson also came from London and is described as being a very charitable and gracious lady, with her benevolence and devotion to the interests of the suffering and needy on land and sea and her charities extending to all neighbouring churches at the time, though she was chiefly concerned with the John Robinson Memorial Congregational Church in Gainsborough of which she and her husband were involved in the building of. She, together with her husband greatly enriched the lives of the people of Beckingham, the shipyard and others. Many attended her funeral when she died at the age of 89 years on 14th March 1934. She was interred in Willingham where she resided for many years.



Their nephew William Spencer Watson joined his uncle at the shipyard, moving from Fulham shortly after his uncle's move to the area. He took over the running of the shipyard after his Uncle's retirement until his own death in 1956/57. The shipyard was then run by his wife Amy and two daughters Kathleen and Nora, until its closure in 1962. Nora remained unmarried and was a rather formidable lady not afraid to speak her mind. She was well known in the village for her eccentric ways, travelling around on her moped, always wearing her woollen hat no matter what the weather was like. She loved her plants spending many hours tending them in her greenhouse staying up until 4am, not rising until late morning. An international flower arranger, a subject on which she wrote books, Nora spent a lot of time preparing for competition at the Chelsea Flower Show and was a judge of flower shows with connections to Kew Gardens.

Responsible for acquiring a **Village Hall and Playing Field** for the benefit of the village residents in 1948, she organised much fundraising for equipment. She was also responsible for the acquisition of the **Recreation Room** in 1970's. Her generosity was felt by the village every Christmas Eve when she would go round the village leaving presents on doorsteps. Nora died in May 1973 and was outlived by her mother who died in 1979 at the age of 102. Kathleen was married to Arthur Bloomer and they had two children, Robin and Shirley. Shirley grew up to become Women's Doubles Finalist at Wimbledon and winner of the French Open tennis championship. She married Chris Brasher the 3000m steeplechase Olympic medallist runner who was also Roger Bannister's pace setter for the 4 minute mile record breaking run. They had three children. In 2007 the village was pleased to welcome Mrs Brasher to open the newly renovated and extended Village Hall.



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