

George Hanson Wheatcroft Mill Owner of Wirksworth.

George Hanson Wheatcroft was born in 1850 in Millers Green, Wirksworth, Derbyshire, son of Joseph Wheatcroft a tape manufacturer since 1844, from Cromford, and Sarah Hanson.

He had a brother, Nathaniel 1846-1868 and a sister Mary Douglass 1848-1909.

Nathaniel, who died aged 21 is buried in Wirksworth with his grandparents Douglass and Nathaniel.

Sacred/to/the memory of/DOUGLASS/wife of/NATHANIEL
WHEATCROFT/of Cromford/who departed this life/December 17th
1857/aged 73/also/NATHANIEL WHEATCROFT/who departed this
life/December 2nd 1862/aged 85/also of/NATHANIEL WHEATCROFT/
grandson of the above/who died June 27th 1868/aged 21 years. (Gritstone
headstone. & coped stone)

Mary Douglass married Henry Hills in 1882 and died in Stafford in 1909.

The family owned the Haarlam, Speedwell and Bleach Mills also Millers

Green (then a separate village) and the farm (wards). The Barrell and Stonebridge Farm. They also owned a gas plant at North End Mills.



*The Barrell. This Farmhouse was formerly a pub until
Closed down by the Wheatcrofts on purchase.*

The Wheatcrofts were strong Congregationalists, and if any of their employees had not been to service on Sunday an explanation was required.

George Hanson was a keen cricketer and played for Wirksworth in the 1860s and 70s.

In 1872 the cricket club got into financial difficulty and George was appointed to the committee to try and sort out its debts in order to continue playing matches for that season which he did.

Joseph retired in 1872, leaving George in charge of Speedwell Mill.

His workforce presented him with a timepiece and the event was recorded in the Derby Mercury.

WIRKSWORTH.

PRESENTATION TO J. WHEATCROFT, ESQ.—Tuesday last was a day of great interest to the workpeople employed by G. H. Wheatcroft, Esq. (who has lately succeeded his father in carrying on the factory at Millers Green), as they had determined to present a testimonial to their late employer (J. Wheatcroft, Esq.) on that day. It was arranged for the presentation to be made in the factory, and at two o'clock the employees assembled in the warehouse to meet Mr. Wheatcroft. Mr. Samuel Till, the manager, who, owing to his being a very old and faithful servant, was chosen to make the presentation, made a short but very appropriate speech, and presented Mr. Wheatcroft with the testimonial, which consisted of a beautiful timepiece, the design being most elaborate and very neatly executed by Messrs. Haywood, of Derby. The testimonial had the following inscription engraven on it:—"Presented to Joseph Wheatcroft, Esq., J.P., by his employees, on his retiring from business, as a grateful tribute of their respect and esteem, and also for the considerate and uniform kindness shown towards them. March, 1872."—Mr. Wheatcroft, in expressing his thanks, said nothing could be more pleasing to him, on his retiring from business, than to receive from his workpeople the assurance that he had gained their esteem and respect. During the 28 years he had been in business he had always endeavoured to do his duty to his employees. The present they had that day given him would be very highly prized, not only by himself, but by all his family, and would be handed down to the next generation as a proof that the world is not quite so bad as some would make it appear to be. He considered himself amply repaid for any act of kindness his employees might have received at his hands by the pleasant meeting they had had on the 8th of January and the resolutions passed at that meeting. This further unexpected expression of their gratitude would be accepted as a proof that they, at least, thought he had endeavoured to do his duty in the position of life to which he had been

Derby Mercury March 1872

On May 15th 1874 he married Ada Maria Ashcombe, second daughter of Mr John Ashcombe of Nether House, Sewardstone at the ancient Abbey Church of Waltham Holy Cross. The bridal party, which was a large one arrived at the church in ten carriages each drawn by a pair of horses wearing wedding favours. The bride was attired in white satin and wore a headdress of orange blossom and a tulle veil. She was attended by four bridesmaids, one of whom was sister to the bridegroom and the other three were sisters of the bride. Each bridesmaid wore a Swiss muslin dress trimmed with bows of blue ribbon and sprays of white and pink heather. The bride was given away by her father. The service was performed by Rev. James Francis. The organist Mr J Chalk skilfully played Ave Maria, Festival March, Wedding March and Handels Chorus. At the end of the ceremony the bells in the old tower rang out some merry peals and the wedding party returned to the house of the brides father, where a number of relatives and friends were entertained in honour of the happy event. Later in the day the newly wedded couple left for Torquay where they intend passing the honeymoon.

The couple had seven children, six sons and one daughter:-

Joseph Albert 1875-1931, Hubert Ashcombe 1877-1971, Kenneth D 1881-1964, Cyril John 1884-1961, George Hanson Jnr 1888-1915, Ronald Duncan 1890-1916 and Ada Muriel 1883-1962.

They lived in Bank Terrace(now the Causeway), Wirksworth and in 1880 George was advertising in the local press for a chauffeur to drive his Wolseley Landaulette.



Wolseley Landaulette

I assume it wasn't the same driver who was involved in a car accident nearly forty years later.



In 1880 he formed the Wirksworth District Liberal Association, its 110 members paying a shilling per annum.

Like his father before him George became involved in local politics and served as a Councillor, Alderman and Justice of the Peace.

He was also a member of the Mechanics Institute and Treasurer of the Floral and Horticultural Societies.

The family moved to Waltham House, on the west side of St John Street, Wirksworth. Built around 1800 the house was purchased for £1,000, together with the adjacent cottage for £350, in 1927 for use as a Cottage Hospital funded by the towns quarrymen. It is now a care home.



Waltham House

George was instrumental in the proposal of a new Infant School in 1895 and a new Grammar School in 1908 and gave generously of both his time and money in support. He was also heavily involved in the building of the Bolehill Reading Room and Institute. Although strictly opposed to Public Houses being open on a Sunday(The Wheatcrofts were staunch members of the Temperance League) he had no objection to the Institute being open on the Sabbath provided non sectarian religious literature be laid upon the tables and that some good religious instruction be given on a Sunday evening under the supervision of a professing Christian man.

Like his father before him, George Hanson was well respected by his

workforce who were treated annually to a works outing. In June 1887 to celebrate the Jubilee some 200 in number together with family and friends set out to Liverpool for the day. A special train was engaged for the occasion as the party set off from Wirksworth at 6.00am arriving at Liverpool at 9.00am. The weather was fine and an enjoyable day was spent by all. In addition to paying the railway fares, Mr Wheatcroft kindly gave each of his workpeople a shilling for refreshments. The train arrived back at Wirksworth at 10.30pm. Before leaving the station the crowd gave hearty cheers to Mr Wheatcroft and his family.

George was a staunch supporter of Lord Edward Cavendish who served as a Liberal MP for West Derbyshire and attended his funeral at densen in 1891.

George took over from the Duke of Devonshire as Alderman for Derbyshire County Council.



George Wheatcroft second front row.

George, his wife and daughter Ada were regular visitors to Cheltenham Spa, staying at the Queens Hotel, known as one of the noblest buildings in Europe.



Queens Hotel Cheltenham

He was a great advocate of spring water believing in its healing properties.

Joseph Wheatcroft, the oldest member of the local bench of magistrates died in 1911, the local newspapers described him as a great benefactor in the district. He is interred with his wife in Wirksworth.

In loving memory of/SARAH WHEATCROFT/born July 5th 1823 died April 1st 1910/Her children arise up and call her blessed/In loving memory of/JOSEPH WHEATCROFT/born January 23rd 1825/died July 2nd 1911.
(Granite coped stone)

Prior to the outbreak of World War 1, George gave up active participation in his business and passed control over to his sons Kenneth and Cyril.

Joseph Albert travelled to Tasmania with his wife Lucy a convicted larcenist to run a fruit ranch.

Hubert became a solicitor in London.

George Hanson Jnr was an electrical engineer. He joined the 16th Heavy Battery Royal Garrison Artillery where he became a Second Lieutenant.

Ronald Duncan a graduate of New College Oxford joined the 6th Battalion Sherwood Foresters where he became a Lieutenant.

The last two were tragically killed during the war.



One of Ronald Duncan comrades Private John Bates tells his story:-

"Then the Sherwoods had to mount the top on to No Mans' land to make the way across, and the Germans were ready for us, but we made them retire into their support line. Our platoon officer, Lieut. Wheatcroft, was leading us down into an advanced trench, when he found it blocked as a result of the havoc wrought by the shells. I was the sixth man from the Lieutenant. The Officer got on top, about 300 yards away from the Germans, and he had gone about 50 yards when he discovered that the barbed wire was not out. He started cutting a way through, when he was hit by a bullet and a piece of shell. He fell onto the wire, and the next to take his place was Private Shaw, of Chesterfield. He was struck by a nose-cap of a shell and fell about 10 yards from the Lieutenant. The next one was a sergeant [L/Sergt. S Sharman] of our platoon, junior to Sergt. Wagg, of Chesterfield , and he

mounted the top, when he was hit with a bullet in the back, but he was able to get back down into the trench again. Following him was Private Green of Whittington Moor. He got a long way when he was struck by pieces of shell. Then came Private Bennett, of Chesterfield. There were no N.C.O.'s to lead us, and we did not know which way to go, so Sergt. Wagg came up the trench from the rear of the platoon, which was his place. Looking over the top he saw the Lieutenant, and went out under heavy shell fire, extracted him from the wire, and pulled him into the trench again. The Lieutenant was covered with blood, and he said 'Fetch Shaw', which he did, and pulled him in. Lieut. Wheatcroft then ordered Sergt. Wagg to send us back again into our lines, and he went for Green under heavy shell fire. Private Bennett received his wound from the shell just as the Sergeant had got back to the trench. I was covered with earth, almost buried. The sergeant said it was the 'rummest' corner we've ever been in. He shouted 'Come on, John,' and we did our best for the Lieutenant and the boys. We carried them back to the dressing post."

For this act of outstanding bravery Sergeant Wagg was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal:-

1680 Actg. Sjt. R. Wagg, Notts and Derby R. For conspicuous gallantry. 'All the party, except Serjt. Wagg, were hit within 30 yards of their trench, and he carried the officer on his back to an advanced sap, and returned twice for two other men. He then reorganised his party.

The Derbyshire Times reports:-

Three weeks ago we announced that Sergt. Clarence (Dick) Wagg; whose

wife lives in St Mary's Gate, Chesterfield had been recommended for the D.C.M. This week Mrs. Wagg has received a letter from her husband stating that he has been awarded the coveted decoration. During heavy fighting, Sergt. Wagg gallantly brought in to the British trenches Lieut. Wheatcroft, of Wirksworth, Pte. Chas Shaw, Stonegravels, Chesterfield, and another soldier, who had all been wounded. Unfortunately, Lieut. Wheatcroft and Pte. Shaw afterwards succumbed to their injuries. Sergt. Wagg has received a warm letter from Lieut. Wheatcroft's father, Mr. G. H. Wheatcroft, expressing gratitude at the gallant act and hoping that he may have the opportunity some day of personally thanking Sergt. Wagg.

After the War the Wheatcroft Family presented Dick Wagg with a Gold Half Hunter watch in gratitude for his actions in trying to save their son that day



Ronald Duncan Wheatcroft

WHEATCROFT, GEORGE HANSON, 2nd Lieut., 16th Heavy Battery, R.G.A., 5th s. of George Hanson Wheatcroft, of Waltham House, Wirksworth, co. Derby, J.P., by his wife, Ada, dau. of John Ashcombe, of Sewardstone, co. Essex; and brother to Lieut. R. D. Wheatcroft (*q.v.*); *b.* Wirksworth, 26 Aug. 1888; educ. Rugby School, and Trinity College, Cambridge, where he took his M.A. degree; subsequently served three years in an Engineering works, after which he held an appointment in the Federated Malay States; returned to England in Dec. 1914, in order to join the Army; obtained a commission in the R.G.A. 9 Jan. 1915; served with the Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders from June, 1915, and was killed in action near Mailly Maillet. 11 Aug. 1915. Buried in the Communal Cemetery there. The Major Commanding the Battery wrote: "I had got to look upon him as a personal friend as well as a valuable officer. He had a charm of manner that endeared him to all ranks. It seemed to me quite wonderful how he picked up his knowledge of gunnery and the work of the battery in his short period of service. He was my senior subaltern and was very valuable to me." *Unm.*

George Hanson Wheatcroft Jnr

After the war there became a decline in the Mill Industry in Wirksworth.

Wheatcroft closed down the gas plant at North End Mills in 1921. A fire which broke out in Xmas 1923 destroyed there property in Brook St. and the firm were hit by a series of compensation claims due to injuries to workers.

Maria Wheatcroft died in 1924 and is buried in Wirksworth. George, together with his daughter Ada left Derbyshire and moved to The Hayes in Radlett, Hertfordshire.

In 1937 The firm offered the Wirksworth Urban Council ten houses at Millers Green for a cost of £35 each.

George Hanson Wheatcroft died on February 26th 1937 and is buried with

his wife.

In loving memory of/ADA MARIA/wife of GEORGE HANSON
WHEATCROFT/died November 20th 1924/"Underneath the ever - lasting
arms"/also of/GEORGE HANSON WHEATCROFT/died February 26th
1937/Blessed are the pure in heart/for they shall see God. (Granite celtic
cross & kerb.

**DEATH OF MR. G. H.
WHEATCROFT**

**WIRKSWORTH MAN'S
USEFUL WORK**

The funeral will take place at the Wirksworth Churchyard, tomorrow, of Mr. George Hanson Wheatcroft (87), of the Hayes, Radlett, and formerly of Walton House, Wirksworth, who died on Friday.

A son of Mr. Joseph Wheatcroft, a County magistrate, Mr. G. H. Wheatcroft entered the bleaching and manufacturing business, which his father founded at Speedwell Mill, Wirksworth, and took over control at an early age.

He was keenly interested in public work, and was elected chairman of the old Wirksworth Local Board after some years' service. He held the position until the Board was replaced by Wirksworth Urban Council, of which he became the first chairman.

COUNTY WORK

He also represented Wirksworth on the Derbyshire County Council for many years, both as Councillor and Alderman. He was chairman of the Wirksworth bench of magistrates, and sat regularly until about 1917.

He gave up active participation in his business just before the war. Under his direction, the business grew to considerable proportions, and he opened the Haarlem Mills at Wirksworth, and the Markeaton Mills, Derby, which are now controlled by his sons, Messrs. K. D. and C. J. Wheatcroft.

Derby Mercury Feb 1931

The Mills

The steam-powered Speedwell Mill, a former hat factory, was converted for tape manufacture in 1844 by Joseph Wheatcroft. In 1858 the Wheatcroft firm acquired Haarlem Mill, steam and water powered, which had earlier been worked in conjunction with Arkwright's mills at Cromford. The thriving family firm later established its own bleachworks at Wash Green where it also had a dye yard, so eliminating the expense of sending all its material to Matlock for bleaching.



Speedwell Mill



Grade II listed Haarlam Mill with the Wheatcroft House on the left.

Originally a felt fulling Mill, Haarlem Mill was converted by Sir Richard Arkwright around 1780 for cotton spinning. Arkwright installed a steam engine to pump water from below the waterwheel back into a large millpond (now vanished) in drought conditions. Around 1815 the Mill was used for tape weaving and soon became the producer of the famous red tape used to tie legal and business documents. It is said George Eliot's novel "Mill on the Floss" was based on Harlem Mill (Adam Bede's cottage is right opposite the Mill). From 1814 the mill manager was Samuel Evans, the uncle of novelist George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). She frequently stayed with her uncle and aunt, and Haarlem Mill was the setting for many of her novels including the Mill on the Floss and Adam Bede.

In the latter years of the 19th century, the weekly output of 230 people employed at Speedwell and Haarlem Mills in Wirksworth equalled the circumference of the earth. Under the broad description of tape makers these workers were producing a wide range of narrow fabrics, from boot laces to ferrets (stout cotton or silk tapes) and smallwares (haberdashery), they also produced the red tape for Whitehall.



Bleach Mill. Wash Green