

Wyatt Bros (Whitchurch) Ltd

As far as I know the first Wyatt to work in Whitchurch was my Great Grandfather, William Wyatt, who had worked around the Midlands and North Wales as a builder and engineer, being involved with the design and installation the water supplies for Oswestry, Wem, Sandbach and to some degree Nantwich. His building work had centred in Warwickshire, often repairing and replacing buildings on an Estate at Kineton owned by Lord Willoughby de Broke. It was here that he met his wife Mary Woodley, the daughter of William Woodley who was the local excise officer. William Wyatt was asked by Baroness North to draw the working plans for Wroxton Hall to her design and then he moved to North Wales and worked as the assistant to the architect on the Marble Church of Bodelwyddan at, I understand the request of Lady Margaret Willoughby de Broke. He then moved to Ellesmere to work on water supplies in Shropshire and Cheshire and while living there he had an enquiry from the Whitchurch Local Board, the precursor of the town council, for the design of a cattle market in Brownlow street. When they applied for loan funding for the market they were told that the town water supply was more urgent so William Wyatt became the engineer to research the water source and Whitchurch finished up with a pumped water supply from Fenns Bank, a series of wells near the canal bridge. Local contractors were employed for the various works and Smiths Foundry cast the pipes used on the water supply and William Wyatt's son, William Woodley Wyatt was employed to oversee the various contracts. When completed William Woodley Wyatt who was living in Whitchurch applied for the post of Engineer and Inspector of Nuisances at Whitchurch. He was shortlisted but the job went to a Mr Baxter, who was a soft drinks manufacturer of Alkington Road, I believe in the building which later became the brewery and then the laundry. W W Wyatt was a man of extreme volatility and story has it that he cursed everyone involved with the local Board. In the midst of the tantrum he said 'if they don't want me I will set up as a contractor' to which his father replied 'if you do you won't last twelve months'. Such is the faith fathers have in their sons.

William and WWW had an office in Whitchurch from which they advertised as Wyatt and Son, Architects and Engineers and this was on the first floor of the Town Hall which was then near the bottom of High Street. WWW needed room for a workshop and he negotiated with Lord Brownlow for some land on the North side of Waymills and he appeared confident that he was successful. However before he closed the deal the land was sold to another, a close friend. It is a measure of his temperament that from that moment the two friends never spoke or did business together. Subsequently, he bought land on the South side of Waymills and so Wayland Works was established. Little is known of his early work except that he advertised extensively using parish magazines. He designed a water softener which was referred to in one advert as Wyatts patent water softener. The purchase of the land was about 1880 and some 15 years later he took out a mortgage to build the first brick building on the site, a three story workshop with offices above. At that time or earlier he had closed the High St office and opened a bicycle shop further up the road. The Town Hall had been moved up High St and the old building was taken over by Barclays bank. WWW had made a small drilling rig, using a slip rope on a barrel and was still building brick wells in places where

boreholes were unproductive. It appears that around 1900 the company of Wyatt and Son had established a name for itself as water engineers.

WWW had married Marian Brotheridge around 1880 and the marriage had produced eight children, seven boys and a girl, the first Charles in 1883 and the youngest Gilbert in 1895. Two of the boys had died in infancy, of the rest Randal, born in 1891, emigrated to USA and Percy, born in 1893, emigrated to New Zealand. WWW had been joined in the business by his brother Thomas but he died in 1903. Over the following 25 years the three sons still in England joined the business. They had all been educated at Whitchurch Grammar School and one had worked at Joyces possibly as an apprentice. After the first World War the company developed and secured contracts for the water supplies to a number of Estates throughout Cheshire, North Wales and the Midlands. Inevitably the recession the late 20s and early 30s slowed down the development of the water engineering side of the business but the then partners were determined to keep their labour force and secured contracts for the excavation and laying of ducts for post office cables, some as far afield as Rugby and South Manchester. As trade improved they returned to the water industry and when District Councils looked into extending their distribution water systems, the company secured contracts for boreholes, pumping plants and underground mains for larger areas. The advent of the second world war resulted in the workshop being switched to making parts for sea mines and the drilling rigs being largely used to provide water supplies for Air Force Stations, Army camps, anti-aircraft batteries and in some instances ammunition stores. Only a limited number of staff continued with the private work.

After the war three more members of the family joined the company, the third generation, and there was development into more mechanical equipment with the purchase of modern drilling rigs, widening the scope of the well drilling. At the same time agriculture was moving ahead, heavier stocking of the farms led to a demand for water and this was encouraged by Government grants. Irrigation became more popular for more consistent crop yields and in some instances this would involve boreholes or water storage. In the early 1980s a further member of the family who had done specialised training in water and civil engineering, joined as the fourth generation. As the agricultural work reduced the company turned to industry and started sinking boreholes for factories and hospitals. In 1990s it was decided to offer the company for sale and in 1993 it became part of Anglian Water. One member of the family remained with the new company, the others had retired or left over the previous six years but had retained an interest in the water supply industry. Over the following years the company became subject to a management buyout and after some ten years of operation in this way was bought back into the family. Currently, some 135 years after founding the company continues under the name of Wyatts and is based on the Waymills Estate, on land once owned by William Woodley Wyatt, the original founder.

Footnote. The above was compiled by Roland Wyatt, grandson of the founder and son of the youngest of the five brothers. He joined the company in January 1947, was called up for National Service later the same year and returned to the company in August 1949. Held various offices in the company, firstly as a labourer then as a site manager, director and company secretary and finally as managing director. He left the company in 1989 and worked as a water consultant for a further ten years doing work for estates, farmers, the Environment Agency and Severn Trent Water, eventually retiring at the age of 70.