

George William Reeve

The death of George Reeve in May 1984, in his 94th year, brings to an end a very active and eventful life; an apt example of 'village lad makes good'. He was born at Bawdeswell, where his parents kept a public house, in December 1890, but about three years later the family moved to a house now called Tuctway in Booton, just beyond the beck on the Norwich Road.

He started his education at Booton school, but, for some reason, couldn't settle down and it seems that the remainder of his schooling took place at Lyng, living with his grandmother. An early job, probably during school holidays, was 'odd job boy' at Moor House; one task was attending to the pumping of water to a tank at the top of the house, by a mule driving a pump in the garden.

Little is known about the next few years but in his later 'teens' he worked in London for a corn merchant and even managed to purchase a car, quite an achievement around 1908, although on his own admission he 'had to run it mainly on paraffin' to keep expenses down. While in London he became friendly with some American students who apparently spoke highly of prospects in the States, so George decided to go with them when they returned to their homeland, selling his car to pay for his passage, but being completely 'broke' on arrival.

Making use of his motoring experience, he got a job with a well-to-do American family acting as their chauffeur and taking their children to school, but around 1914 he obtained a job with a government construction firm in Washington (New Jersey) largely engaged on war supplies. There he achieved remarkable success, becoming Chief Inspector by the end of the war.

One of his treasured possessions was a silver cup presented to him in 1918, at a dinner given in his honour, inscribed "... as a token of esteem by his Inspectors and Checkers".

At some time after 1918 he left the construction company and traded on his own in the removal business, employing several drivers. He also had some connection, manufacturing and selling, oil burners with a trade name of 'Islander'.

We must now jump to 1936 from which time much moving around took place. He first returned to this country in July 1936 but, as he had meantime acquired American citizenship, was only allowed an 'Alien Permit' to land for six months with no authority to enter any employment. Returning to America he again came to England in 1939 with permission to stay for 12 months.

For a time, he stayed with his sister, a Mrs. Muddle at Lyng, and some time at his parents' house at Booton. In 1940 he stayed at a hotel in Thetford which seems to have something to do with the restrictions on his activities as he was still classified as

an 'alien'. He had by then managed to acquire another car and, according to an entry on his passport, was officially 'allowed to use his car in connection with his business' whatever that was at that time. In February 1941 he was exempted from the 'Alien Restriction Order' on such occasions when called upon for Ambulance Duties, and unconditionally exempted in October 1941.

Soon after the end of the war he started building his house at Moor Corner doing much of the building work himself – even making the tiles one at a time. He moved during 1946 and established a tyre business, in the separate building adjoining the roadway, which he carried on until around 1965.

On the domestic side of his life, it appears that he, at some time, married a British girl who joined him in America but could not settle down to the life there. She returned to this country and they were subsequently divorced. There was one son from that marriage. He later married an American girl, his son from that marriage is still in America.

For the last 10 years of his life George received devoted care from his housekeeper Mrs. Brett who, incidentally, has given much assistance with the compiling of these notes.

One little 'monument' to George Reeve is the ironwork seat standing near Moor Corner, which was placed there and cemented in when he heard that the authorities were planning to widen the road by taking in the wide grass verge which he claimed belonged to him. Whoever was in the right, the seat is still there, and the road not widened!

That lad from Booton certainly had an active life.

George Kett

From an article published in the Reepham Society Newsletter, January 1985



Above: The Reeve family circa 1900 at Booton. George is next to his mother; the other boy is Walter who lived at Hackford Vale and for many years ran a carrier business. He was also a J.P. and served on the local bench. In the centre is Violet (now Mrs. Muddle), aged 96 and living in Kent, she drove up to see George early in 1984.