

## **A Family Business and its Influence on the Village of Rimington for over 100 Years**

For three generations, the Spencer family joinery, wheelwrighting and undertaking business was a well-known part of Rimington village life. In the 1880s, Richard Spencer took over the business in Stopper Lane whilst still quite a young man when the previous owner, under whom he had trained, decided to retire.

The premises consisted of a three-storey former mill which was the workshop alongside which was a smithy used for the wheelwrighting part of the business and, a little higher up the lane, a shed for the pitsaw where the oak trees for coffins were sawn. Two skilled craftsmen came by train from Clitheroe to perform this task which required extreme accuracy to produce the beautiful boards needed for coffins. Across the road were two pieces of land separated by the lane leading to the school. On the right were woodsheds and a stable for the horse, trap and cart which, in the early days, was the means of transport used. On the left was a croft for the horse to graze. Attached to the mill was the house, "Overbrook", which became the family home.

When Richard took out insurance in 1887, he became the very first customer of "Cook and Smith" Insurers in Church Street, Clitheroe. Cook and Smith kept a framed copy of this on the wall in reception all the time they were there. The workshop was described as "stone-built and slated or tiled and lighted by paraffin lamps. There is a circular saw bench therein worked by wind power." Hence the firm was known as "Wind Saw Mills". The windmill atop the workshop was a landmark which, in its day, attracted great interest amongst visitors to the village. It features prominently on photographs of the Peace Day celebrations of 1919 but was blown down in a storm in the 1920 having been replaced by modern forms of power.

Richard produced a thriving business with a total of seven employees, some of whom travelled by train from Clitheroe and Gisburn. In 1894, he married Alice Ann Duckworth who lived round the corner in Stopper Lane where she helped in her father's grocery store next door to the Methodist Chapel. Her family were closely involved in the life of the chapel and her brother, Francis, composed the hymn tune "Rimington". The couple brought up their family (two sons and a daughter) all of whom were involved in the business in their separate ways. First, the eldest son, Arthur, joined his father but left for service in France in the first World War, so younger son, Harry, left school in 1916 to help his father and took over as wheelwright making carts and rakes for local farmers.

Arthur returned safely from the war and, along with his brother, continued in the business for the rest of his working life. On his marriage he needed a home in Rimington and bought the farm buildings and land which had been part of Rimington estate owned by the Pollards. In 1929, he created out of this a comfortable family home, "Southwold" (later re-named "Spencers Cottage"), with garden and croft which served two generations for almost seventy years. Meanwhile, Harry remained at the house in Stopper Lane until his retirement in the 1960s.

Following his father, Arthur became the chief undertaker which took him into the homes of so many village and farming families throughout the community, a duty he carried out with quiet dignity. Perhaps best known in this connection was the funeral of Lord Ribblesdale in 1925 whose body was brought by train from London over-night to Hellifield Station, then to Gisburne Park by horse and cart, and was finally laid to rest in the vault beneath Gisburn church.

But the main part of the business was the building and repairing of homes and farms over a wide area (including up to Shap) and, though times were hard during World War II, through scarcity of timber, farming was important and much work needed to be done. A very big job in the early days was all the joinery work in the first Gisburn Auction Mart. Of a different kind, was work in the house known as "Gisburne Park" and throughout the estate. In Rimington, the Memorial Institute was built on part of

the family croft in 1927. In the same year, Rufus Carr's garage was built and, in the 1920s, the joinery work on Edgar Duckworth's garage with all its later extensions and its eventual conversion into Cosgrove's fashion house until it was demolished in 2004. In 1940, much work was carried out when Rimington School was converted into a residence. Gisburn church and Martin Top chapel also benefited from their skills over many years.

Arthur's son, John, continued the family business but from a new workshop built in 1959 in the croft adjoining his family home, Southwold. Following his retirement in 1998, the business passed on to his employee, Stephen Johnson.

The former Wind Saw Mills building was converted to houses in the 1970s.