

BERTIE WILLETT

Brian Albon has researched the following.

In the “Antivirus” section of the SPC website there is a piece about a gentleman named Bertie Willett taken from the Steam Plough Times Issue No23 of 1972. My attention was drawn to this when I noticed in that he had lived all his life near Ware in Hertfordshire. I too have lived all my life in Hertfordshire so this was of particular interest.

I started thinking about whose new engines Bertie *may* have bought back to Hertfordshire from Fowlers at Leeds. I decided to see if I could find out more precisely where Bertie *may* have lived in Hertfordshire using the “Find my past” website to which I subscribe.

I found a person who I believe could be Bertie in the 1911 Census. This person’s full name was Herbert Thomas Willett who was born in 1897. His place of birth is given as Levens Green, Munden. His address at the time of the 1911 Census was Levens Green, Great Munden, Ware, Hertfordshire. His occupation at the time is shown as a Farm Errand Boy and his age is 14 years old.

As soon as I saw Levens Green as his address I wondered if Bertie had any connection with George Fox who I knew had owned several *new* Fowler ploughing engines over time. George Fox at one time had his base at Levens Green, Hertfordshire.

He had been in partnership with John Bailey at Great Gobions Farm, Stapleford, Hertfordshire. However by the 6th January 1912 this partnership had been dissolved by mutual consent and George Fox had carried on the business alone at Levens Green, Great Munden, Hertfordshire. The source of this information was the London Gazette, dated 20th February 1912.

The ploughing engines owned from *new* by George Fox at Great Munden, Hertfordshire are as follows, although only one set look likely to have been collected in November, as the article describes.

The engine details below were obtained from Bill Smith in 1991, when he was the keeper of the SPC Records.

I had asked about engines which had belonged to John Patten of Hall Farm, near Bishops Stortford, Hertfordshire. The engines mentioned below had at some time later been owned by John Patten.

I don’t know what the dates quoted below actually refer to. I have assumed they the dates the engines were despatched or completed at Leeds.

This set would appear to be the most probable that Bertie was involved with.

Class AA6 No.13727 To George Fox on the 31st October 1917.

Class AA6 No.13728

The other engines were,

Class BB No.14183 To George Fox on the 31st March 1914.

Class BB No.14184

Bertie would have been too young to collect these engines I think. He would have been about 16 years old.

Class AA/ZA No.15362 To George Fox on the 8th September 1919.

Class AA/ZA No.15363

This pair I suppose may have been collected in November, but why wait?

Whether or not I have found the correct Mr. Willett and some of the engines he collected new from Leeds we will probably never know.

Presumably there were transport restrictions during WW1 and that was why he collected the engines and why they were not dispatched by rail?

Brian Albon, Baldock, Hertfordshire .

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Dick Eastwood has added the following

John Billard drew my attention to your research into 'Bertie' Herbert Thomas Willett which I read with interest. I have followed your notes and reasoning and must say congratulations! It all seems to point to the George Fox engines being the likely engines collected from Leeds.

The three sets that you mention were all new to George Fox -

13727/13728 were AA6 Class and completed 31st October 1917.
Named "Beatrice" and "Ivy". To John Patten ... date unknown.

14183/14184 were BB Class and completed 31st March 1914.
Named "Stanley" and "George". To John Patten in 1924.

15362/15363 were AA7 Class and completed 8th September 1919.
Named "Lion" and "Tiger". To John Patten in March 1926. [Both to Germany in October 2019]

George Fox also had a fourth set - AA2 Class numbers 10628/10629 completed 30th November 1905. The original order from William Soper in Wilstead, Bedfordshire was cancelled and the pair went to (John) Bailey & (George) Fox on 20th December 1905. They named them "Alpha" and "Beta".
I assume they went to George Fox when the partnership was dissolved in 1912? These also ended up with John Patten, in January 1925.

A couple of other facts from my own checks:-

Ancestry.co.uk has Herbert T. Willett as Head Gardener at St. Edmund's College, Ware in the 1939 records.

Born 5 May 1896, Died 19th December 1975 - His address when he died is given as 3 Far Lane, Old Hall Green, Ware, Herts.

F.H. Willett displayed his model plough engine at the Thames Valley Traction Engine Club in the Scouts Hut at Cray's Pond, near Woodcote, Berks., late 1969/early 1970

and,

Mr. F. H. WILLETT of Sunningdale, Berks., very kindly brought his working model of an AA plough engine to the Hughenden Park, High Wycombe, Rally, 10th May 1970. It stood near the Club's stall and attracted a lot of attention. Mrs. Willett looked after the stall.

I guess it is fitting that the model he constructed was of an AA Class plougher?

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