

Coseley family who were builders for four generations

EVERY family has a story to tell and it is the search into the fascinating lives of our forebears that motivates many genealogists. Simple records, such as census returns, baptism and wedding certificates, or trade directories can reveal details that shed light on our ancestors and their lives, whether unusual or everyday.

Ian Abbotts, originally from Kingswinford but now living in Ledbury, has been researching his ancestors, particularly the **Whitehouse** family, who for generations were bricklayers and builders in Coseley.

Ian is descended from the family through his grandmother, **Lydia May Whitehouse**, and Ian's father, **Cyril Abbotts**, born in Coseley but now living in Malvern, remembers some of those Whitehouse ancestors. Ian had kindly sup-

plied the Bugle with details of the Whitehouse family and these photographs.

The Whitehouse clan hails from the Coseley, Princes End, Toll End and Tipton areas and were builders for four generations over more than 125 years. Ian has traced the Whitehouses back to **Thomas Whitehouse** and his wife **Ann Aston**, both born in Tipton, Thomas in 1782 and Ann in 1786. Thomas was a bricklayer in the 1810s and 1820s and later a blacksmith. He and Ann had six children: **Harriet** (b.1809), **Josiah James** (b.1811), **William** (b.1813), **Ann** (b.1815), **Thomas** (b.1817) and **Mary** (b.1820).

Josiah James Whitehouse followed in his father's footsteps and was the first of the family to advance himself in the building trade. In the census of 1841 he was listed as a bricklayer but

by 1851 he was a master bricklayer employing six men. He lived at 2 High Street, Princes End, with his family and a domestic servant, so he was clearly a man of means. With his wife **Ann** (b.1817) he had eight children and three of his sons became builders too. The children were: **William** (b.1836), **James** (b.1839), **Thomas** (b.1841), **Jabez** (b.1842), **Sarah Ann** (b.1843), **Harriet** (b.1845), **Josiah** (b.1847) and **Mary** (b.1856). **William**, **Jabez** and **Josiah** all became builders.

Bricklayer

In the 1851 census, when aged 15, **William Whitehouse** is listed as an assistant bricklayer and in 1871 as a bricklayer. He lived at 20 Albert Street, Coseley.

Josiah Whitehouse is also recorded as living at 20 Albert Street, Coseley, and in census returns

and trade directories from 1871 to 1916 he is recorded as a bricklayer, and apparently did well enough to employ a domestic.

In 1871 **Jabez Whitehouse** was living with his brothers and he too was a bricklayer. Later census returns and trade directories show him as a master builder with staff from 1885 to 1916 and living at 21 Albert Street. He married **Louisa Diggett** (b.1861) and together they had ten children: **Arthur James** (b.1877), **Walter** (b.1878), **Joseph Diggett** (b.1882), **Phoebe Ann** (b.1883), **Edith Louisa** (b.1886), **Jabez** (b.1887), **Harry** (b.1889), **Ethel** (b.1892), **Lydia May** (b.1896, Ian Abbotts' grandmother) and **Philip** (b.1898).

Two of Ian's photographs show **Jabez Whitehouse** and his family. In the older family group picture, taken in the early 1900s, we have, standing across the back from left: **Joseph**, **Walter**, **Ethel**, **Arthur**, **Jabez**, and **Harry**. On the front row are: **Lydia May**, **Phoebe**, **Louisa**, **Jabez senior**, and **Edith**. The lad at the front is the youngest son **Philip**. A second photo-



Jabez and Louisa Whitehouse with their ten children.

graph shows the Whitehouse brothers some years later, probably around the time of the First World War. From left we have: **Jabez**, **Arthur**, **Walter**, **Philip** and **Harry**.

Of **Jabez Whitehouse's** sons three became builders. **Walter** was a bricklayer from the 1900s to at least 1936. He lived as 20A Regent Street, Princes End and later 77 High Street, Princes End. He married **Esther Russell** of Tipton and they adopted her

nephew, **Norman Johnson**, son of **Harry** and **Jessie Johnson** when **Jessie** died after giving birth to **Norman**.

Joseph was a bricklayer in 1901 but by 1909 he was a carpenter. He emigrated to California and in the 1910s and '20s he worked on Hollywood film sets. **Jabez** was a carpenter from the 1910s to the 1940s.

Ian's father **Cyril**, the son of **Lydia May Whitehouse** and **Sydney Abbotts** has some recollections of the Whitehouses. He remembers 21 Albert Street, Coseley, as a three-storied house with a big cellar and nine rooms; in the backyard were stables and a two-storey workshop of which the upper floor was a carpenter's shop. At 77 High Street, Princes End, **Cyril** remembers playing with **Walter's** adopted son **Norman** in **Walter's** builders/plumbers workshop where they wasted a lot of valuable lead making things.

At the age of eight **Cyril** moved from the Whitehouse family home, at 21 Albert Street, to "Cydor", 23 Bradley's Lane, Coseley. The house was named for **Cyril** and his sister **Doris** and was built for **Sydney** and **Lydia** but, surprisingly, not by the Whitehouse family. Sadly, **Lydia May** died of kidney failure in 1930, before she could move into the house. **Sydney** remarried, to **Hilda Walters**, in 1933 and **Sydney**, **Hilda**, **Cyril** and **Doris**

moved into **Cydor**. From this time **Cyril** somewhat lost touch with the Whitehouses.

Although the Whitehouses were builders for four generations Ian can only identify one building that they constructed, the Gospel Oak Wesleyan Chapel.

All ten of **Jabez senior's** children were baptised there and **Joseph**, **Edith**, **Jabez**, **Ethel** and **Lydia May** were also married there. Five of **Jabez senior's** grandchildren were baptised there too and two of them were married there also.

Ian and **Cyril** would like to know if anyone has a photograph of the Gospel Oak Wesleyan Chapel as they believe it has been demolished. The Whitehouses were builders for more than 125 years and so must have worked on hundreds of buildings in the area. Can someone tell Ian and **Cyril** about any of these and are any of them still standing? Ian would also like to hear from any descendents of the Whitehouse family.

Ian has also included a photograph of his father in the Dudley Grammar School cricket first XI, c.1936. **Cyril Abbotts** is second from left on the back row, next to the scorer, but can anyone name the other players?

Finally, we have a second picture of **Cyril** in 1944, when he served with 57 Squadron, RAF Bomber Command, flying Lancasters from East Kirkby.



The Whitehouse brothers: Jabez jnr, Arthur, Walter, Philip and Harry.



Dudley Grammar School cricket team c.1936.



Cyril Abbotts in 1944.