

Ben Sewell - Furniture Maker

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December 17, 2007

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Figure 1: Ben working in the Boys' Central School

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1 Introduction

My father was very widely known as Ben Sewell among his friends in Grantham, such as his colleagues at the Boys' Central School, and members of Grantham Cricket Club and Belton Park Golf Club. He was christened Vern Edward, and known as Ven within his family. For example, my mother Nora and his sister Doreen always called him Ven. He was never the more common Vernon. I believe that outside the family Ven seemed an unknown given name, and in that wider circle people believed his name to be Ben and called him that (this being just assumed to be an abbreviation for the more regular but erroneously supposed name Benjamin). In due course, this even led to me being called Ben by some when I was in the sixth form at school.

So because this article is about his work, I will use the name Ben Sewell here. He was born on 16th March 1906 at 23 North Street, Grantham. His father Edward was a barber on those premises, who later moved his business to 50 Westgate. In 1914 Edward set up a tent in Belton Park to provide, with four assistants, hairdressing and shaving for the soldiers encamped there. Ben's mother Elizabeth was the only daughter of Joseph and Mary Ann Cook. Much more is said about his family, with photographs, in the book which I wrote in 2007 called *A Sewell Family History 1807 - 2007* (see References).

One of Ben's great-great-grandfathers was a carpenter, namely John Sewell of Bourne, born in the early years of the 19th century. So was Ben's elder brother Cyril, who was born in 1902.

Photographs exist of Ben as a child, in 1908 and 1911 (see Fig. 2), but then not again to my knowledge until the year of his marriage to Nora Elizabeth Richardson in 1931. Fig. 3 shows a happy photograph of Ben and Nora taken in the early 1930s. A letter to Ben from Canon Hancock survives dated 24th April 1930, and addressed to him "c/o Miss Storr, Alexandra Terrace, Trusthorpe, Mablethorpe, Lincs." The terrace house in the background looks much like where we stayed (at No. 7) as a family of five, with Dora Regina Storr, for several seaside holidays in the late 1940s.

2 Schools

My sister Ann believes he attended a Wesleyan Primary School in Wharf Road, and that he first met our mother Nora Richardson there. Nora was born at 9 Dysart Road, just around the corner from 50 Westgate, on 1st March 1906. I have a book carrying a bookplate on the inside front cover with the inscription "Grantham Wesleyan Sunday School, Awarded to Vern Sewell, 2nd Prize, 1919". It is by Gordon Stables, M.D., a surgeon in the Royal Navy, and is called "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" (see References).

Ben won a so-called Free Place Scholarship at Dame Margaret Thorold's Grammar School in Sedgebrook in September 1918. From Grantham he traveled either by train, a journey of perhaps 15 minutes, or, at least in the summer, by bicycle. If it was a very nice morning, when Euclid or French was due, and prep. had not been done, a more extended ride to School might be found, via Gonerby or Woolsthorpe-by-Belvoir. The School had about 90 pupils, of whom about 60 came from Grantham. Sedgebrook is on the Nottingham side of Grantham near the bottom of Barrowby Hill, and at the northern extremity of the Vale of Belvoir. His Spring Term 1919 School Report survives from Sedgebrook. It is reproduced in my "Family History", and shows him to be competent in Mathematics, Science, English and Drawing. He told me that he was happy at that School, but it was closed in that summer, and the pupils were transferred to The King's School Grantham. His King's School cap and tie for a 14-year-old have survived from that time, and are seen in Fig 4.

Ben told us a story of Derby Day at King's School in 1920. The mathematics master was Captain R.W.D. Lee, who had been in the Army during the war and "was perhaps surprised to find himself still alive. He had all the attributes of a Captain, the military attitude, brush



Figure 2: Vern Sewell 1911



Figure 3: Ben and Nora Sewell c. 1930



Figure 4: Ben's King's School cap and tie 1920

moustache and so forth". He came into the room on Derby Day, threw his mortar-board on top of the cupboard, abandoned the expected lesson, and said "Who wants half-a-crown on the Derby?". "The whole form sat up and looked, a few smiled, and he then proceeded to give us the most memorable maths lesson that I ever remember. First of all he showed us how to reckon up the odds - what 2 to 1, and 11 to 4, and 8 to 5 meant, and having done that he then demonstrated how the information arrived in the betting ring by means of the tic-tac men with their white gloves. We were fortunate in some of the men who taught us. They all seemed to be characters. At the end of that year Captain Lee left the School to enter the Church. He became Chaplain of Christ's Hospital, and later Vicar of Horsham".

Two of Ben's Reports survive from The King's School, for the Summer and Autumn Terms of 1920, when he was 14 years old (see Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). Except for French, they display rapidly improving performance in key subjects. For example, reading and spelling score 80/100, mathematical subjects 60 to 90 per cent, and chemistry and physics 80/100. At Christmas his Report concluded with the general comment that "He has achieved top place on examination results." His "Place in Form" was 5th out of 24 boys. Four masters who signed his subject Reports were the same as signed my own, at the same School, thirty years later, namely T.H. Brunyee, M.E. Shipley, P.J. Stokes and V.R. Waterhouse.

Notwithstanding these scholastic achievements, when he returned home from School at Christmas 1920, his mother told him: "Your Dad and I think you have had enough schooling. You start at Parks' on Monday". Messrs. Parks and Son was a local firm of joiners. He told me that he was rather disappointed at this announcement, because he had been quite enjoying School.

When I read the complimentary details in these two Reports, I can feel that disappointment myself about his parents apparent response to them. But it would have been the regular custom of the time, in that strata of society composed of many small businesses in a small market town, that an apprenticeship was the common next step.



The King's School, Grantham.

Report for the Term ending 29th July 1920

Name Nern Edward Sewell Form III Lower

Place in Form 8 No of Boys 20 Average Age 14 yrs. 0 mths.

SUBJECTS.	Full Marks.	Marks obtained	REMARKS.
<i>General</i> RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE	50	31	
ENGLISH—Reading	100	72	} Good. <i>sp. g.</i>
Spelling and Dictation	100	86	
Grammar	100	45	
Composition and Literature	100	65	
WRITING	100	55	Fair. Has improved. <i>Feb.</i>
HISTORY	100	63	Good progress made. <i>W.R.W.</i>
GEOGRAPHY	100	43	Good. <i>Feb.</i>
LATIN	100	—	
FRENCH	100	28	Weak. <i>Sept.</i>
GENERAL ELEMENTARY SCIENCE <i>Chemistry</i>	100	61	Very Good He is top of the <i>Form</i> <i>V.R.W.</i>
NATURAL SCIENCE <i>Physics</i>	100	38	
ARITHMETIC	100	71	} Satisfactory R.W.D.
MENTAL ARITHMETIC	50	35	
ALGEBRA	100	43	
GEOMETRY	100	35	} 29
<i>Weekly test in Arith.</i>	50	29	
DRAWING	100	—	
SINGING	—	—	
CONDUCT	280	262	Good. <i>Sept.</i>
HOME LESSONS	916	630	

Height ... | 5 | 2 | Weight ... | 7 | 9 | Chest Measurement ... | 29 |

Attendance—Absent 6 half-days, and late 2 times to 17th July Weekly Detention— 0 times.

GENERAL CONDUCT AND PROGRESS

A good term's work. I hope that he will pay attention carefully to the weak points. 5th in Exam's

Satisfactory

N.B.—The next Term will begin on 20th Sept. and end 20th Dec. about
Every boy is expected to be present or accounted for on the first day of the Term.

W. J. Parkes Form Master.

Alex. Tate Head Master.

Figure 5: School Report July 1920



The King's School, Grantham.

Report for the Term ending Christmas 1920

Name Sewell V. E. Form IV R

Place in Form 5 No. of Boys 24 Average Age 14 yrs. 10 mths.

SUBJECTS.	Full Marks	Marks Obtained	REMARKS.
RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE	100	51	
ENGLISH—Reading	100	48	
Spelling and Dictation	100	80	} Very Good. P.W.B. } Very Fair. } Very Fair.
Grammar	100	54	
Composition and Literature	100	54	
WRITING	100	45	
HISTORY	100	50	shows considerable improvement
GEOGRAPHY	100	73	Very good. W.L.P.
LATIN	100	-	
FRENCH	100	24	Result disappointing: generally does much better work
MATHEMATICS—Arithmetic	100	45	} Very Good. Steady work being done in Arith. & Geometry
Algebra	100	59	
Mental Arithmetic and Algebra	100	90	
Geometry	100	71	
Trigonometry	100	-	
Mechanics	100	-	
SCIENCE <i>Chemistry.</i>	100	84	} Very Good. Improved towards end of term. J.H.B.
<i>Physics</i>	100	78	
DRAWING	100	66	Good. M.G.
CONDUCT	260	190	
HOME LESSONS	1455	699	

Physical Measurements	Height ft. in.	Weight st. lbs.	Chest Measurement in.
	5' 4"	7' 13 1/4"	31"

Attendance—Absent 15 half-days, and late 2 times to Dec^r 15th Weekly Detention 1 time.

GENERAL CONDUCT AND PROGRESS

He has achieved top place on examination results, but French needs attention. He has lost term marks through absence.

N.B.—The next Term will begin on Jan^r. 18th 1921 and end March 23rd 1921.
Every boy is expected to be present or accounted for on the first day of the Term.

P. J. Stokes. Form Master.
Alex J. Tali Head Master.

Figure 6: School Report Christmas 1920

3 Carpentry and Joinery Training

On Easter Monday 1979, 16th April, I had a long conversation with my father at my house at 82 Shinfield Road, Reading. Aided by a tape recorder and my secretary, I was able to have a 39-page transcript of it typed, which I called “The Joiner’s Tale”. Among several other subjects, such as schoolboy reminiscences of some effects of the 1914-1918 war on Grantham, including a Zeppelin attack, early aeroplanes, schooldays and cricket stories, it included some remarks about his early professional training. I have since retyped “The Joiner’s Tale”, in the same format as this article, to make it more widely available.

My father joined the firm of builders and contractors headed by Major Parks on 10th January 1921, about two months before his 15th birthday, and worked for them until 31st May 1929. Their premises were in Swinegate, opposite St. Wulfram’s Church, and less than fifteen minutes walk from his home at 50 Westgate. It was a very old stone house. At that time Parks’ were doing a lot of the building work required in Grantham. In particular, they were busily engaged in the government sponsored Wheatley housing scheme, building houses in Dysart Road, and in surrounding villages such as Carlton, Gonerby Hill, and in the Vale of Belvoir (Wheatley was the Government Minister).

My father was employed as an apprentice joiner, and served his seven-year apprenticeship there. During 1927 he became qualified as an Associate of The Incorporated British Institute of Certified Carpenters. After his death a certificate to this successful completion of Ben’s apprenticeship, dated 5th November 1927 and shown in Fig. 9, which I had not previously seen, was found in his home workshop at 26 Gorse Rise. What is believed to be an examination piece made by him around this time, also found in his workshop, is shown in Fig. 8. There survives a note in his diary for Friday 14th January 1927 which says “Started on drawing of Tympanum Pediment overdoor and architrave for my City and Guilds model tonight”. This must refer to the piece whose finished version is that in Fig. 8. He stayed on at Parks’ for a further two years.

He did every kind of joinery work for Parks’, including making coffins, window frames, pieces of furniture, roofs, and so on all around Grantham. There is, or used to be, a book-case in St. Wulfram’s Church which he made, and also a reading desk there, on the left of the pulpit. Walter Parks and his family were keen Methodists, and he was a local preacher. His firm was given the job of gutting and entirely reseating the Wesleyan Chapel in Finkin Street, and putting in a new gallery. My father was closely involved in all the constructional work, and making the seats from pitch-pine. Walter Rowarth and he re-did the pulpit and cut new stairs for it, and renewed the handrail. About sixty years later, when I was invited to be the Guest Speaker and present the prizes at The King’s School annual Speech Night in 1986, I was able to tell the assembled parents and boys that “my father made the seats upon which you sit”.

The Vale of Belvoir extends from Sedgebrook to the west and south-west of the area shown on the map in Fig. 7. It contains estates of the Duke of Rutland, such as Eastwell Hall, where Ben Sewell helped to build a large stable yard with loose boxes, and it rises to the villages of Waltham-on-the-Wolds and Freeby. He helped to build stabling for the Duke of Gloucester in Melton Mowbray.



Figure 7: Grantham and the Vale of Belvoir on the 1930 Ordnance Survey map



Figure 8: Examination piece of oak moulding by Ben Sewell 1927

THE INCORPORATED



BRITISH INSTITUTE

OF

Certified Carpenters.

FOUNDED 1890.

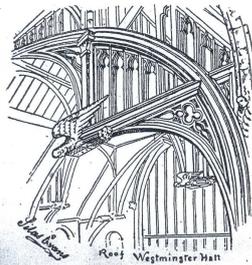


This is to Certify

that VERN EDWARD SEWELL
having passed the qualifying
Examinations in accordance with
the Rules of the Institute has been
duly elected ASSOCIATE
of the above.



Dated. 5TH NOV 1927



President,
Vice President,
Treasurer,
Secretary,

[Signatures]
Benjamin Fletcher
C. W. Hancock
[Signature]

Carpenters Hall, London Wall.

Figure 9: Associate of the British Institute of Carpenters

A Captain Fielding had a stud farm down Freeby Lane, out of Waltham, and Parks' were asked to build a house for him there. This was built in an antique style using old stone from demolished cottages, and thatched with Norfolk reeds. Ben made the front door for it, which included a small iron grill look-out. The same architect was then asked to design a house for Sir Gilbert Greenhall, on the Melton side of Waltham. Parks' built it in about 1926, and it was called Waltham House. Some of the stone was from churchyard walls, such as at Stonesby, and pantiles for the roof were from some old maltings that were being pulled down in Grantham.

4 John Bullimore

Messrs. Parks and Son was started in about 1870, by Danny Parks, and when Ben Sewell joined them they were just advertising that they had been established for 50 years. Ben knew Walter Parks and some of the Parks daughters. Walter had taken over the business from his father. The oldest employee was John Bullimore, who had started with the original founder, and he was the senior joiner who spent most of his time using workshop skills, either on the premises, or on indoor repairs in all the houses round about. He taught my father much when Ben was first apprenticed to Parks'.

John Bullimore was born in about 1855. He lived in Barrowby with his mother, who was a widow. In 1868 he was apprenticed to Ruston and Hornsby, an engineering firm in the south of Grantham. John used to walk the three miles from Barrowby every morning to be in Hornsby's by 6.00 a.m., and then home again in the evening, leaving at 5.00 p.m. Employees there were allowed a lunch break of 50 minutes, and they could leave at 4.00 p.m. on Saturdays. Bullimore's work at Hornsby's included the construction of the wooden parts of threshing machines, and other parts of agricultural machinery. That is how he learnt his trade, not as an apprentice to a builder. All the wood in those days was sawn in sawpits, and then planed up by hand. Welby Street was known as Sawpit Lane in John Bullimore's day, because several sawpits were located there.

Later John did some work at Wellingore Hall, towards Lincoln, and he helped to lay a mahogany dance floor there. At Parks' he became the general factotum, who could do everything, and incidentally train apprentices. He lived with his wife in Sidney Street. They had two daughters, and a son who became a "clurk" (of which fact John was very proud) first at Hornsby's and later at Lucas in Birmingham. John was a pillar of St. Saviour's Church, now demolished.

5 Diaries

Ben's diaries have survived for some days between 1st January 1925 and 21st January 1927, with daily entries of three or four lines for some continuous periods of days or weeks, mostly in the earlier months of those years. These entries are sufficient to give some insight into his daily life as a nineteen- and twenty-year-old. He was four years into his seven year apprenticeship with Parks', living at home at 50 Westgate, and a regular attender (often twice) at St. Wulfram's Church on Sundays. I have transcribed these diaries into a more

accessible form as “Diary of an Apprentice”. Ben came under the lasting influence of Canon Bernard W. Hancock, the Vicar of Grantham at this time, who confirmed Ben in 1923. In 1928 Hancock moved to be Rector of Algarkirk near Boston. Many letters from him to Ben and Nora survive from 1928 to 1948 (when Hancock was 88). They are obviously in reply to letters from Ben.

There seems to have been a genuine issue about the viability of Parks’ in this period. The firm became much reduced in manpower, but Ben kept his job, either working “in the shop”, or going to do outside jobs, even occasionally walking to outlying villages (such as Barkston) for the purpose, and then back. He often traveled to Nottingham and back by train in the evenings after work, (“Going to Notts”) in pursuit of professional qualifications, which he attained at the end of his courses. He was diligent about homework. Ben explored the social life of a teenager. Going to “pictures with Cyril” (his brother) and others occupied some winter evenings, and cricket at London Road was quite frequent in summer. On Sundays Ben often went not only to Church, but also for walks with male friends like Wilf Beck to outlying villages such as Harlaxton or Harrowby or Barrowby, which would be an unlikely activity now. (Wilfred Beck was Ben’s Best Man when he married Nora Richardson in 1931). Girl friends Winnie and Margaret are also mentioned in the diaries: on 31st March 1925 “Went to Notts as usual. Margaret waited for me and we went on the Fair”. But on 4th June 1925 “saw Margaret tonight and finally finished with her”. Life was eventful.

6 Teaching Posts

During the 1920’s Ben Sewell had also been qualifying as a handicraft instructor by passing examinations of the East Midlands Educational Union, and the City and Guilds of London Institute, as an item in The Grantham Journal for 1929 tells us. “He was one of the first building students to be awarded a Kesteven Technical Exhibition to University College Nottingham. Under a scheme controlled jointly by the Board of Education and the City and Guilds Institute, skilled craftsmen may become teachers of handicraft; Mr. Sewell who had already conducted building classes at the Grantham Institute, has the honour of being the first of its students to be recognised under these regulations.” From 1920 to 1924 he had been attending courses at the Grantham Technical Institute, and from 1924 to 1927 Ben travelled by train to University College Nottingham and back on three evenings each week to attend advanced courses on Carpentry and Joinery. In 1948 University College Nottingham became The University of Nottingham. Ben’s son Michael, this author, later became an undergraduate there, and in 1962 Lecturer in Mathematics.

As recorded in “A Sewell Family History 1807 - 2007”, on 30th May 1929, at the age of 23, Ben Sewell became Handicraft Instructor at the Inner Street Centre in Grantham. He moved from there on 1st January 1933 to take charge of Handicraft at the Boys’ Central School on the corner of Sandon Road and Hill Avenue, and he stayed there for 38 years until he retired in 1971. He taught woodwork and metalwork at the Boys’ Central School under four Head Teachers: Sam Thorp, Martin Bailey, E.W. Jacob and Aubrey Easter. He was Deputy Head from 1951 until 1971, and Acting Headmaster more than once during the illness of the Headmaster. Fig. 10 is a photograph of the School from Sandon Road



Figure 10: Boys' Central School

in 2007. Fig. 1 shows Ben working, with a class of boys, in the workshop there in about 1944.

The Sandon Road buildings were new in 1928. They are indicated on the 1930 map revision shown in Fig. 7, from which we can see that Gorse Rise, where Ben Sewell later lived, is not shown because it was not built until 1931. The School occupied that corner site for about 50 years before it moved to Rushcliffe Road off Manthorpe Road, and is now called The Central Technical and Sports College.

As stated in the Introduction, Edward Williamson Sewell was a barber in Grantham occupying premises at 23 North Street and then 50 Westgate. He was the father of Ben Sewell. There is in my possession an oak and glass shop window screen from Edward Sewell's shop. I do not know who made this shop furniture, but it is very much in the style of my father's work, so I think it is likely that he made it, and probably in this period of around 1930. It is shown in Fig. 11.

For many years the glass-fronted display cabinet shown in Fig. 12 stood in Ben Sewell's workshop at 26 Gorse Rise. I do not recall that it was ever kept in the house. It is made of oak, and my guess would be that he made it also in this early period up to about 1930.

7 Schoolmaster

The photograph of the Boy's Central School in Fig. 10 shows, nearest the camera, the long wing with tall windows which was Ben's Workshop. This external appearance is not very different from what I knew in the 1940s, even though the buildings have housed a Primary School for some years now. When I was a young teenage schoolboy on the way home to 26 Gorse Rise from the King's School in the late 1940s, I sometimes called in to visit my father in that Workshop, to wait until he dismissed the boys at 3.45 p.m. so that I could walk home with him. The routine was that he would line up the class along the sidewall just before the School bell rang, and then he released them. This Workshop, shown in Fig. 1, was furnished with several workbenches in two rows, toolracks, lathes, bubbling gluepots, a furnace, a storeroom for wood and metal, and other requirements of the subject. In the 1950s



Figure 11: Edward Sewell's shop window screen

a new building was built nearer to Sandon Road. This housed several more classrooms, and a new Workshop. Fig. 13 shows a display of some of the pupils' work in that new Workshop.

That building has since been removed, but from it Ben could wave to his daughters Ann and Paula as they walked to or from the Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School. One of Ben's old pupils wrote to tell me that "I wonder if your sister ever told you that all of Ben's class were waving to her as well, behind his back."

Sam Thorp's son John has written of his Grantham childhood at their house in Harrowby Lane, very near to Gorse Rise and to the Boys' Central School, in a book called "Tales of My Youth" published in 2006 (see References).

Ben also taught evening classes in the late 1940s at Grantham College at the bottom of Avenue Road, for two hours, on two evenings each week.

In July 2007 I published a letter in The Grantham Journal asking if any of Ben's former pupils had recollections of him which they would like to share with me for this account. I received a gratifying response, from men of different periods. A shortened version of some of their comments follows next. It might be inappropriate to quote with explicit names, so I will use letters instead, with the dates when each was at School.

A 1933 - 34. "I had great respect for your father, who endowed me with a life-long love of wood. Several articles now in our family were made at School. The associated skills have passed on to my son and grandson."

B 1942 - 47. "Ben helped me with the conversion of an oak coffee table, partially finished by my older brother, into a piano stool which is now in regular use by my daughter. Older



Figure 12: Display cabinet



Figure 13: Pupils' work in the Boys' Central School

pupils with satisfactory skills were invited to adopt a metalwork project, of which the most prestigious was to build a steam engine. Ben's ambition was that a model double-acting slide valve steam engine would be married to a model destroyer, the prestigious woodwork project. Other items which he made were a bed warmer for his own family, from two concave sheets of planished copper welded together, and a rocking horse for his colleague F.A. Speechley. I was delighted to meet Ben again in the 1970s, and to tell him of my career."

C 1943 - 47. "Ben was strict but fair. He made woodwork very interesting, and I made a stool and a clothes-horse. At least three in my class became joiners. 30 years later I attended an Open Day at the School, and Ben (retired by then) recognised me from behind."

D 1945 - 49. "He was a very competent teacher, who never seemed to rush, and he imparted his knowledge to us boys in a clear and precise manner. I have used these skills in all my later DIY projects. He umpired boys' cricket matches, and played when the masters' team played against other schools."

E 1946 - 51. "One didn't argue with Mr. Sewell. You knew who was boss".

F 1947 - 51. "Ben was a true craftsman, who was fair but firm, and I really believe he enjoyed his teaching position. Among other things, he always made it very clear that chisels or planes, and not files, were to be used for smoothing wood; and joiners secured two pieces of wood together with a joint, and not with nails."

G 1951 - 56. "Ben was a very good teacher, disciplinarian and, in later years, a friend. He told us the correct way to use all the tools of the trade, and also what not to do. For example, never use a hammer on a chisel, use your hand or a mallet. After making dovetail joints successfully, we were allowed to make a wooden tray, and then a footstool. I still have mine. The trays reduced in size during construction when some of the dovetail joints holding the sides together had to be repeated. Our next project was a tea trolley, which required sixteen tenon joints. Ben was always at hand to correct our handiwork. He taught us how to sharpen a carpenter's pencil with a chisel - always away from your hand. When he discovered that I was into aircraft model making, he encouraged me to bring ten models in to put on display in School. I can see him now standing near his desk swinging a lath of wood like a golf club or cricket bat. He was a fine, fine chap and quite unforgettable."

H 1951 - 56. "I have very fond memories of Ben during my Central School days, and I know that he was well respected by all at the School. He is always part of the discussions when Old Boys of the School meet. He kept a set of cricket stumps mounted on a woodblock, which he would bring out into the playground during some lunch breaks. I was captain of the U14 XI, and Ben would require me and others to bowl at him, while he demonstrated strokes. He ran School cricket teams, and organised visits to Trent Bridge to show the boys some first class cricket."

I 1952 - 57. "He was a very good teacher, very strict but very fair, who would pull you into line. I chose to make a clothes-horse, and my first attempt was greeted with "What's that? A pair of socks couldn't hang on it". But Ben helped me to repair it, and when it was taken home my parents were delighted. "Did you make it yourself?" A cricket bat was kept in the Workshop, and strokes were demonstrated from time to time with a tennis ball,

which once landed in a gluepot. Ben's response was "I've heard of a sticky wicket, but I've never heard of a sticky ball".

J 1965 - 70. "He taught us step by step to make a paper biplane and explained some aerodynamics on the way. He stood at the top of a step ladder to launch his own version, which really flew."

K 1970 - 71. "We pupils had the utmost respect for him. He was a very fair and well liked Deputy Head."

In *The Joiner's Tale* Ben tells us that the Boys' Central School began in 1920 as the Central and Day Continuation School in a building behind the Town Hall which had previously been part of the local gaol. Sam Thorp was the first Headmaster, and when he first arrived he was much amused to find that his office door sported the notice "Female Prison". This could still be seen even after the door was repainted. Ben attended wood carving classes there in the early 1920s until, after leaving one winter evening at 8.45 p.m., he was astounded to hear the next morning that the School buildings had been burnt down in the night, by a fire which started in an adjacent boiler room. Called from his bed to the fire, Sam found one of his former pupils, now a fireman, up a ladder. Sam shouted "What are you doing, Willers?". Willers replied "I'm trying to put the fire out". Sam responded "Well, let it burn. We'll get a new building then".

So the School had to move to new premises at Middlemore House in Castlegate for two or three years, until the Education Committee, having bought the Sandon Road/Hill Avenue corner plot as a playing field, built the new School buildings on it by 1928. Ben Sewell had made doors and windows and roof structures for it while he was with Parks'. So eventually Ben came into the rather unusual position of being in charge of a School which he had helped to build with his own hands.

Papers survive, including strong references by his mentors, which indicate that Ben applied, or at least seriously thought of applying, for other teaching posts, for example in Kent (1928), Brighton (1937), Cambridge (1937), and Holyhead (1939).

8 26 Gorse Rise

Ben Sewell married Nora Richardson on 28th May 1931. They became the first tenants of 26 Gorse Rise, one of a new street of council houses built by Grantham Borough Council in 1930 - 1931. As explained in Section 3.3(b) of "A Sewell Family History 1807 - 2007", when they first obtained this house it was "scrubbed out for them" by Edith Raines, a relative, who did such cleaning jobs. Edith (née Hughes) was a cousin of my paternal grandmother Elizabeth Sewell (née Cook).

I can well remember, from the 1940s, the yellow Council Rent Book, and the Rent Man calling regularly to collect the rent and record the fact in that Book. My father was diffident about having a mortgage to help own a property, which my mother would eventually have preferred to do. So he was still a tenant there when he died in Grantham Hospital on 5th

April 1980. My mother kept the house until 1988 when she was no longer able to run it, and she went to live with her daughter and son-in-law Ann and Reverend Richard Garrard. She died on 12th March 1994 at 84 Southgate Street, Bury St. Edmunds. So in 1988 26 Gorse Rise was repossessed by the Council. I believe that, after a change of housing policy, they later sold it, so that it is now privately owned.

When Ben and Nora first moved into the house he was still working at the Inner Street Centre, which was off South Parade, and over a mile from the house. It was eighteen months before he moved to the post at the Boys' Central School at the bottom of Gorse Rise, less than 10 minutes walk from home.

Every newly married couple requires furniture, and some of it promptly. My father, by his training at Parks', and under the guidance of John Bullimore there, had acquired the skills to make furniture. Of course he could not make it all at once, and he needed somewhere to do it. I imagine he used some of the facilities at the Inner Street Centre, and then at the Boys' Central School. But he would also have wanted some facilities at home. I dimly recall complaints of "shavings on the stairs". The house had three bedrooms upstairs, and it seems reasonable to suppose that he did some woodwork in one of them. I did not appear on the scene until 8th August 1934, so three years went by during which he could make furniture without that particular distraction.

It is very evident, by observing the number of pieces of furniture which still exist within the family and illustrated in the accompanying photographs here, that during the 1930s, he was regularly busy with the task of making furniture for the home which he shared with Nora. Moreover, the quality of it is, in my opinion, very high. Much of it is in oak, and he also made many of the brass fittings for it, such as drawer handles and door hinges, himself. He was well-skilled in metalwork too, as well as woodwork.

The main purpose of this article is to make a record, with photographs, of such furniture. The house which it was made to furnish has, on the ground floor, a "pantry" as we called it, under the stairs, on the left of the side ("back") door entry; a "kitchen" on the right of this entry, overlooking the back garden; and two main rooms which we called the "living" room or "dining room" facing the back garden, and the "front" room or "sitting" room facing the front garden and street. Above these two main rooms were two bedrooms of similar size, a smaller bedroom over the kitchen which I occupied, and a bathroom. Entry from the front door gave onto the "entrance" hall and stairs. The house was semi-detached, adjoining 25 Gorse Rise where lived Norman and Myrtle Neal, and their children David and Julia who were contemporary with myself and my sister Ann. I can recall Norman walking up the road in his soldier's uniform on one visit home. He was a CQMS in The Royal Engineers, but he was killed in Algiers in 1942, I believe when a troopship was bombed. He was the Advertising Manager for the Grantham Journal before the War.

9 Dining Room

One of the first requirements of a newly married couple is a table at which to eat meals. Ben Sewell made the gate-legged dining table shown in Fig. 14. It is 2'7" high, in oak, with



Figure 14: Gate-legged table



Figure 15: Rush-seated ladder-back chairs

a cutlery drawer at each end, and 3'8" long in the direction parallel to the drawers. When the leaves are up, supported by the gate legs, the table is 4'2" wide, so that the top is not far from circular then. I do not know when he made the table, but my memory is that all my childhood meals were served at it. The table stood in the "living room", parallel to the back garden window, so that both leaves could be down when not required. When one leaf only was raised five people could share a meal. Two would sit at the ends, and three round the raised leaf. The two drawers are fitted with brass handles which my father made.

He also made, in this early period, four ladder-back chairs in oak, with removable rush seats, woven in a pattern of four triangles meeting at the centre, as shown in Fig. 15. My two sisters, Ann and Paula, and I sat on these seats as children, often tilting the chairs back on the rear legs, so that over the years the joints of the chairs loosened slightly, but noticeably. They served their purpose over time, however.

A major feature of the dining room was always the "sideboard", which Ben had made before I became aware of the room. It stood next to the kitchen wall, at one end of his dining table. I have it now. It has two cupboards at waist height for storing crockery, above which is a flat surface 4'0" by 1'6", on which stands a second part 3'2" high which carries two shelves for the display of plates. It is shown in 2007 in Fig. 16. Part of it, with me standing next to it wearing my Kesteven and Grantham Girls' School Kindergarten cap in 1940, is seen in Fig. 17. Ben's own photograph of it, and of other pieces of furniture which he made, is seen in Fig. 43.

In 1935, before my first birthday, Ben made a child-sized rush-seated chair, with detachable table which fitted onto the ends of the arms, all in oak. I used this for meals, and I am sure my two sisters did in their turn. It is seen in Fig. 18, but with the table not attached. Fig. 19 shows other views of it, in 1935 with me sitting in it, and in 2006 with my three-year-old grandson (Ben's great-grandson) Daniel using it to watch CBeebies.

Another dining room requirement of that period was evidently what we called a "dinner



Figure 16: Sideboard



Figure 17: Michael with sideboard 1940



Figure 18: Child's chair 1935

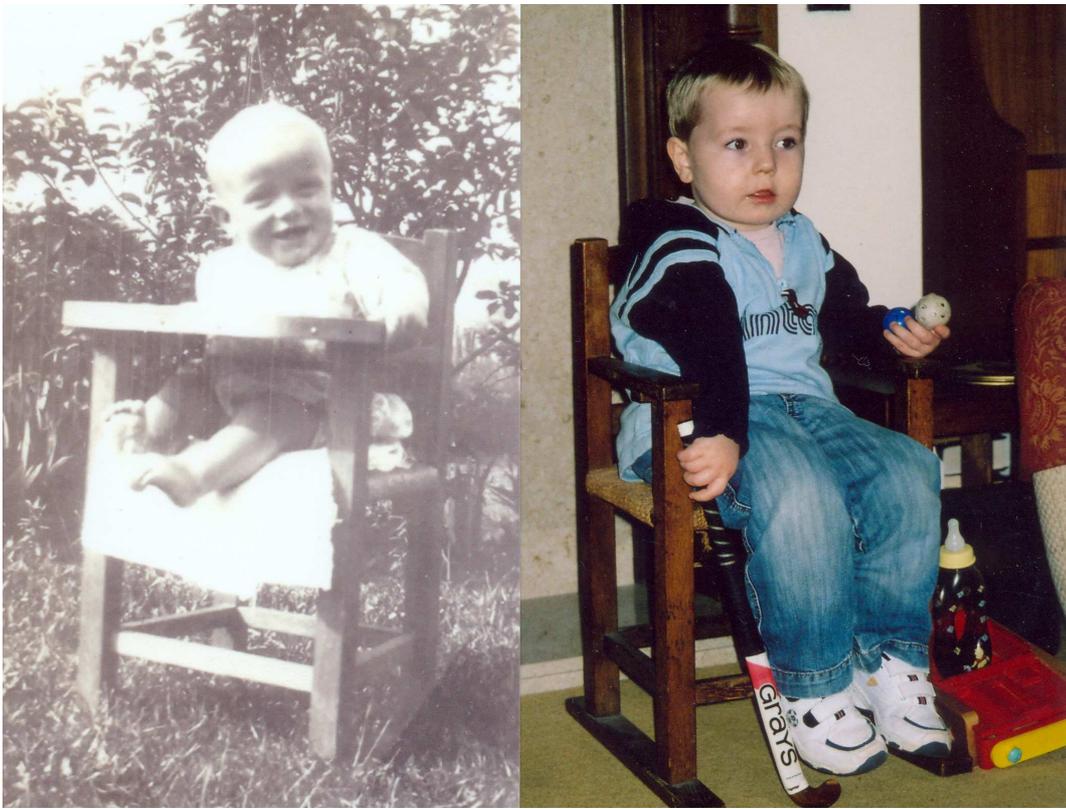


Figure 19: Michael 1935 and Daniel 2006 in the same child's chair



Figure 20: Dinner waggon

waggon”, which might now be called a “tea trolley”. I remember that we had one such at home. It was about 2’3” high, 1’4” wide, and 2’0” long, with wheels at the four corners, with one shelf at the top and another lower down. It carried food dishes as required, dispensed from next to the dining table. It passed out of use as I grew up, and out of my sight and memory too. It was only during the writing of this article that my cousin Stuart Amos reminded me of it, and gave me the photograph in Fig. 20. It now lacks the wheels. I am sure Ben Sewell made it. Stuart is the younger son of my father’s sister Doreen, for whom Ben would have made some pieces of furniture. Stuart, and his older brother Christopher, were pupils at the Boys’ Central School in the early 1960s, where their “Uncle Ben” would have taught them woodwork.

In later years, perhaps in the early 1950s, he made a large oak bookcase, perhaps 4’0” wide and 6’0” high, with a curved top, which stood in the dining room next to the wall opposite the back window. Two oblique views of it are shown in Fig. 21.

In post-war years my father made a second dining table, having a rectangular top supported by pedestals at each end, as shown in Fig. 22 in Paula’s kitchen. In this period Ben also made another ladder back chair, but this time with an upholstered seat (Fig. 23).

Ben made several wooden fruit bowls, turned on a lathe, sometimes in oak, and about 1’0” in diameter. Some were left unpolished, and others were stained a darker colour, and polished. One of these often stood on the sideboard, carrying fruit. Two of them are shown in Fig. 24.

A tray which he made, 1’9” long by 1’2” wide, using oak-faced plywood, is shown in Fig. 25. It has an oak surround 1.5” high, increasing to 3” where it is pierced to provide two carrying handles. He made another similar tray.



Figure 21: Wide bookcase



Figure 22: Rectangular dining table



Figure 23: Upholstered ladder-back chair



Figure 24: Two fruit bowls on the rectangular dining table



Figure 25: Oak tray



Figure 26: Small gate-legged table

Ben also made two small double-gate-legged side tables. They are in light oak, and can stand by the side of an armchair. One or both leaves can be raised as shown in Fig. 26. The size of that table is about 2'0" high, with an elliptical top when raised, having maximum diameter of about 3'6". The other gate-legged table is higher, with different proportions, as seen in Fig. 27.

In due course Ben turned his attention to so-called standard lamps. I have one which is in oak, stained a medium brown, having a circular base nearly 1'0" in diameter, and a vertical "standard" of about 4'6" in height. It is seen with a bought lamp-shade in Fig. 28. Also seen there is a small table lamp about 12" high which he made.

During the 1950s Ben made the agreeable footstool shown in Fig. 29, again in oak, and having an upholstered top, so that it could also be used as a stool in the usual way, to sit on.



Figure 27: Another small gate-legged table



Figure 28: Standard lamp and table lamp



Figure 29: Upholstered footstool

A less conventional piece of furniture in the dining room came into play during the War, to counter the real danger of German air raids. The windows had crossed sticky tape applied to each pane permanently, and my father had also made plywood panels to be fitted on the inside of each group of panes during an air raid. I can clearly remember my mother hurrying to fit these panels in place when a lone German aeroplane appeared over Grantham during the daytime, while at the same time instructing me severely to get away from the window. I wanted to see the aeroplane. Alas I have no photograph of the panels or the aeroplane.

In 1961 our first son John was born, and very soon we needed a playpen for him. Ben made one (Fig. 30), with hinges on one pair of opposite sides so that it could be folded into a flat space only five inches wide when not in use. Later it was used not only by John's brothers Richard and Peter, but also by John's children Jacqueline, David, Thomas and Daniel, so it served well. Unlike the famous mathematician Hermann Bondi, I did not sit inside the playpen to write my mathematics, while my sons or grandchildren played in the room on the outside of the playpen.

10 Kitchen

The kitchen was next to the dining room and, as stated above, included the side door entry to the house. It contained the gas stove, the "copper" in which the clothes were washed in water heated by gas jets, the sink and draining board. There was also a small table, with a cupboard and three drawers below a top which served as the main work surface on which food was prepared, rabbits skinned, chickens gutted, etc. Ben surely made this table, but it has not survived. Neither has an ironing board which he made. It was folded and stored in the pantry; my mother set it up in the dining room to do the ironing, heating the cast irons on one of the rings of the gas stove, and rubbing them on the fibre doormat when



Figure 30: Playpen



Figure 31: Iron

they were hot (why?) before applying them to iron the clothes. Two of these irons have survived, although not made by my father. One is seen in Fig. 31.

When I married Bridgid in 1960 we needed various kitchen items. Ben made a kitchen stool for us, seen in Fig 32. In later years he made a kitchen cupboard for us, shown in Fig. 33, especially to fit in a specific place. Early on we also needed a clothes horse, and he made the one in Fig. 34.

11 Sitting Room

This was the room at the front, looking out onto a pleasant aspect of the widened part of Gorse Rise where the road divides to allow a grass “green” in the middle of the street. It housed a comfortable three-piece suite and, from 1952 onwards, a Bechstein piano. Nora had learned to play the piano in her youth. For me, 1952-3 was my last year at the King’s School in Grantham, and during it I took the opportunity to have some piano lessons from Mr. Stephen Mundy, who was the St. Wulfram’s Church organist and our singing teacher at School.

During the War, however, the most dominant piece of furniture in the room was an Anderson shelter. It was about 3’0” high, 4’0” wide and 7’0” long. Four right-angular steel columns at the corners supported a flat top made of a single sheet of steel, and steel mesh formed the sides, all in battleship grey. My earliest memories of the room are of being put to bed, with my two sisters, to sleep the nights in this shelter, and being aware that my father had gone out on fire-watching duties wearing his large grey helmet. One morning we found that Hitler had made a large hole in the cricket pitch where I played with my friends in a field at the top of Gorse Rise, only two hundred yards away, next to The Three Gables public house on Signal Road. The large flat top of the Anderson shelter proved to be very convenient for marshalling troops of toy soldiers. I wonder how many homes were issued with an Anderson shelter. It disappeared from our house after the War.

This “front room” was the room where visitors were entertained after the War, and where I did my homework in my later School years. Ben made several significant pieces of furniture for it. An early one of these was an attractive writing desk in light oak, with cabriole legs and three drawers. I have it still, and I would guess it to be of (perhaps late) 1930s vintage. It is shown in Fig. 35. The top is 1’6” by 2’9”, and 2’7” high, and therefore smaller



Figure 32: Kitchen stool



Figure 33: Kitchen cupboard



Figure 34: Clothes horse



Figure 35: Writing desk

than many modern “work-tops”. It was not designed to house a computer, for example. The middle drawer is shallower than the two side drawers, to allow room for the knees. Ben used very carefully selected oak with attractive graining for the fronts of the drawers, and I would be surprised if he did not make the brass drawer plates and handles himself. In the summer it stood in the bay window looking onto the street, and I can remember sitting at it every Sunday in 1951-2 to answer a past Advanced Level physics examination paper there. In the winter it stood in the middle of the room, and I used it frequently there to do my mathematics homework. Nora, my mother, always had a coal fire going in the evening in that room, to make it more comfortable for me to work.

The heating system designed for the ground floor was just an open fireplace in both main rooms. On one side of the fireplace in the back dining room was the “tank cupboard” or “airing” cupboard for clothes, and housing the supply of hot water heated by that fire for the house; on the other side was an oven intended for cooking or baking, but that oven was usually superseded by the gas stove in the kitchen. In the front room there was another fireplace, without such side features. The intended fuel was coal. Each house in the street was provided with a brick “coalhouse”, semidetached as one of a pair located on the boundary between adjacent properties. So the house at 26 is semidetached with 25 on one side, and the coalhouse of 26 is semidetached with 27 on the other side. Each coalhouse is capacious, and stored the coal regularly delivered in 20 hundredweight (“cwt.”) bags by Parsons Bros. and Snape. (“Count the bags, Michael”, to check that there were not 19 by “mistake”). The fire would have to be started by newspaper and wood. What wood? One of the exercises for pupils having handicraft lessons at the Boys’ Central School was to make a mortise and tenon joint. Not all of these would be perfectly made, and from time to time bags of such joints would be brought home by my father, and put in the coal house. The inside of the coalhouse door was convenient for suspending, by the feet, for the night, chickens whose necks had just been wrung. I well remember one morning when we opened the door to find the chicken lifting its head up to look at us.

It was convenient to keep a small amount of coal and wood in the house in winter. In the front room this was kept in a coal box which my father made for the purpose, to stand next to the fireplace. This is shown in Fig. 36. It was made of light oak, with substantial brass hinges.

Ben also made an oak fender, with copper lining as shown in two views in Fig. 37, to surround the edge of the fireplace, as a guard against the possibility of coals falling off the fire.

In those years, 1948 to 1953, when I was working for examinations at School, it was the commonly accepted view that “there will always be a need for coal”, and the many British collieries were fully occupied. This situation led me to apply for a National Coal Board Scholarship, which I gained, to finance the first year of a course in Mining Engineering at Nottingham University, before transferring to Mathematics in 1954. We now know about the subsequent decline of the coal industry, and the rise of gas and other fuel sources, which was not foreseen then.

The lighting system in the house in the 1930s and 1940s was by “town gas” piped to every room, where there was either a central ceiling light or, in the smaller rooms, a wall-

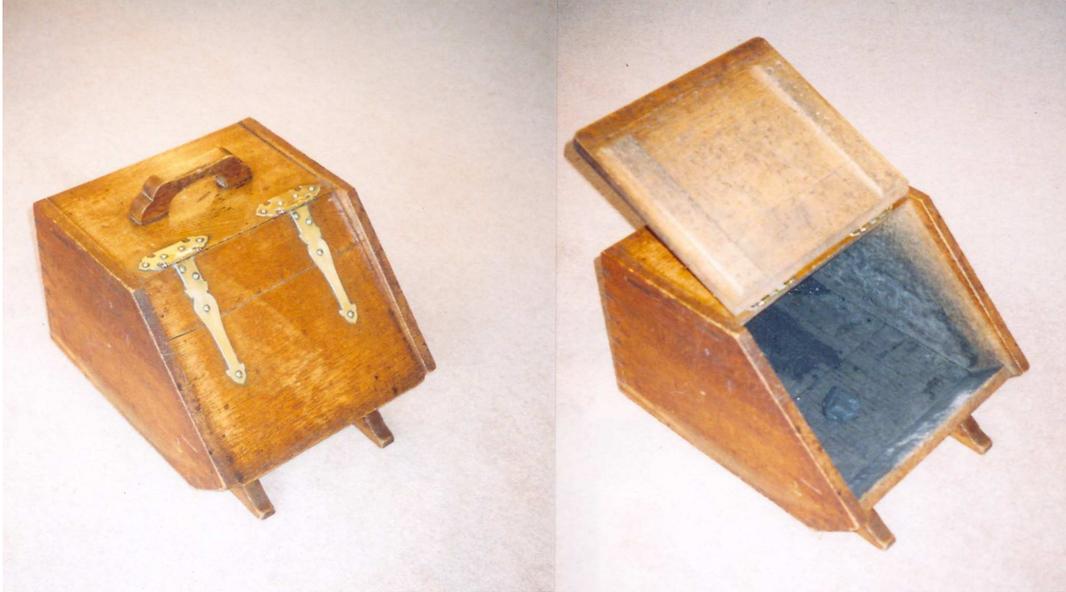


Figure 36: Coal box



Figure 37: Fender



Figure 38: Oval side table

light. Each light was equipped with a “gas mantle”, to which a lighted match was applied after turning on the gas supply using a lever or tap. The gas came locally via gas mains from the town gas works, situated between Harlaxton Road and the end of the Nottingham-Grantham canal (and certainly not from Russia). Electricity came later.

The front room also contained, for as many years as I can remember, a side table with elliptical top, about 2’6” by 2’0”, and about 2’0” high, and having a central turned pedestal with varying diameter (up to 3”) to support it. Ben had made this in light oak, perhaps again in the 1930s, and it is seen in Fig. 38. He also made another such side table, this time with circular top of 1’8” diameter and 1’6” high, for his sister Doreen. When I visited her in the 1990s she gave me this table, and it is shown in Fig. 39.

Ben had stored for many years, in his workshop at home, a large piece of mahogany, and some wide pieces of thin walnut veneer. Some years after he died I asked a young carpentry teacher at Leighton Park School in Reading, Mr. Lunn, if he could use these rather desirable items to make a piece of furniture. He made for us the set of four small square side tables shown in Fig. 40, each about 1’2” wide and 1’3” high. The mahogany piece was cut up to provide the legs and horizontal parts, and the tops were covered with the walnut veneer. It is pleasant to have this legacy as a reminder of what Ben might have intended.

Another major piece which Ben made for the front room, perhaps in the later 1940s, was a corner cupboard, again in light oak, shown in Fig. 41. This is over 6’0” high, and triangular in horizontal section so that it could stand in a corner of the room, at one side of the bay window. It has two pairs of paneled doors, upper and lower, with shelves inside on which to store dishes of various kinds. His own photograph of it is in Fig. 43.

On the other side of the window, and in an alcove to the left of the fireplace, stood a



Figure 39: Circular side table



Figure 40: Side tables in walnut and mahogany



Figure 41: Corner cupboard



Figure 42: Tall bookcase with and without books

bookcase which Ben made, I would guess in the 1930s. This is firmly in the style which he had evolved using light oak. It has been in my consciousness for as long as I can recall, and I have always felt appreciative of this particular bookcase, which is shown in Fig. 42, with and without books. The curved top and the sides are nicely tooled.

Some of Ben's own photographs of furniture which he made have survived, and four of these are shown in Fig. 43. One of the items seen there, hanging from a picture rail, is a bed warming pan which he made in beaten copper. It has a screw stopper in the centre at the front, where the hot water is inserted. It used to hang near Ann's seat at the dining table. When liver was on the menu, it was not her favourite, and she sometimes found it possible to insert the liver surreptitiously into the warming pan. Recent colour photographs of the other pieces of furniture appear elsewhere in this article. The warming pan, which has slightly corroded over time, is seen in Fig. 44.

12 Entrance

The front door of the house opened onto what was always called the "Entrance", which in some houses might be called the "Hall", or "Hallway", for example. At 26 it led to the Sitting Room and then the Dining Room, by two adjacent doors on the left, beyond an umbrella stand, side table and wall mirror. Facing the front door, but at the far end of this "Entrance" beyond these two doors, stood an antique grandfather clock made by Peacock of Lincoln. On the immediate right of this "Entrance", behind the opened front door, was a rack of coatpegs, and then the stairs to the upper floor, turning left at the top where there was a large "landing window".

The space under the coatrack was occupied by an oak linen chest which Ben made, having three panels on the front and back, and on the hinged lid, and a panel at each end. It is shown in Fig. 45, which displays again his evident taste for a light coloured wood, and not the darker staining which one often sees in chests from older houses. The linen chest is a common feature of old houses and so-called stately homes. Ben's chest was made to fit this particular space. The dimensions are 3'2" long, 1'7" wide, and 1'8" high. I have it now, in a light place on a landing, and it looks very well. In Ben's house it was in an unavoidably darker place, and "that was the thing which was always covered by coats" in his grandson Richard's memory. I am sure it was also made in the 1930s, like some of his other primary pieces.

13 Bathroom

This upstairs room contained two items which Ben made. One was a triangular corner cupboard about 2'0" high which was fixed into a corner where two walls met, above the bath. It had one internal shelf. It contained medicines and other usual bathroom things. It is shown in Fig. 46. The other was a rectangular stool which stood next to the bath. Both items were painted white. The stool is seen in Fig. 47.



Figure 43: Ben's own photographs of his furniture



Figure 44: Back view of the warming pan



Figure 45: Linen chest closed and open



Figure 46: Bathroom cabinet



Figure 47: Bathroom stool



Figure 48: Scholar's desk

14 Small Bedroom

Also upstairs are three bedrooms, one at the front and two at the back. The smaller back bedroom used to be my own, and has room for a just a single bed and some small pieces of furniture. In my early teens my father made what might be called a scholar's desk for me to use in that room. It is shown in Fig. 48. Again in oak, it stands 2'4" high, with a hinged lid 1'8" wide by 1'5", slightly sloping in the standard older school-desk style, with a 4" deep compartment under the lid. I used it for homework, and for sorting my stamp and coin collections, etc.

15 Front and Back Bedrooms

The larger back bedroom, and the front bedroom, were both big enough to accommodate a double bed and other furniture. Ben Sewell made several pieces of furniture for them, at varying dates. One of these pieces is a substantial wardrobe in paneled oak. The interior has four parts, namely a full length hanging space on the right hand side, four drawers and a shorter hanging space on the left, and a full width drawer at the bottom. These spaces are closed off by a pair of full length doors, paneled in the same style as the sides of the wardrobe. I would guess that this wardrobe dates from the middle 1930s. It is shown in Fig. 49 and Fig. 50. He also made, in the same paneled oak style, a headboard for a double bed.

I think it may have been in the later 1940s that he began to try out the idea of applying



Figure 49: Closed wardrobe



Figure 50: Open wardrobe



Figure 51: Veneered chest of drawers

thin sheets of walnut veneer to existing pieces of pine furniture, together with castings of brass drawer handles and escutcheons, some of which were his own metalwork. It is speculation now to think that he may have acquired the starting pine pieces from other sources, such as auction rooms. In any event some of these experiments have survived, including two very similar chests of drawers. Fig. 51 shows one of them. It includes inlaid herring-bone strips as part of the decoration. The top is 3'1" by 1'6", and the chest is 2'7" high.

Another veneered item which Ben made is the dressing table shown in Fig. 52, which has solid cabriole legs. This stood for over twenty-five years in the front bedroom. The top and sides have a rather warmer coloured veneer than the chest mentioned above. Ben made a stool, with an upholstered seat, for use with this dressing table. After 1952 this stool, seen in Fig. 53, also served as a piano stool.

In an earlier period, perhaps in the 1930s, Ben made the frames for two ladies mirrors. Each mirror was fitted with a pivot at the sides, and free-standing frames into which they were supported on pivots. One is seen in Fig. 54. It is about 1'10" square and it is intended to stand on a dressing table, which it did for many years in either the front or back bedroom. The other mirror was a so-called cheval mirror, about 1'3" wide and of full length, mounted and able to rotate in a frame which stands on the floor as shown in Fig. 55, so that a full-length reflection is available.

Ben also made, in this period after the war, the substantial oak chest of four deep drawers shown in Fig. 56, with paneled sides, and with his own cast brass handles on the drawers. It stands about four feet high.



Figure 52: Veneered dressing table



Figure 53: Piano stool



Figure 54: Table mirror

16 Garden

The garden at the back of the house is a good size, perhaps 30 yards long and ten yards wide. The house is towards the top of Gorse Rise, on a rising hill-side as the name implies, and from the back garden there is a long view down towards the northern edges of the town, St. Wulfram's Church, and the rising ground on the west of the railway, with Gonerby and Barrowby beyond. A garden seat was evidently needed, and Ben made one, by 1935 if not before. It is shown in Fig. 57 and in Fig. 58.

Ben also made several deckchairs, and wooden frames for garden beds, over the years, but they seem not to have survived.

Much the most substantial feature which Ben made for the garden, however, was what the family always called "The Workshop". He must have built this during the 1930s, so that he could do carpentry and woodwork at home, and so not rely entirely on the facilities at the Boys' Central School. An end view of it is shown in Fig. 59, taken in 1948, with me bowling on the lawn behind it, but other photographs show it to be in place in 1938. The Workshop was made entirely of wood, with planking fixed to a timber frame, and with a pitched roof. Windows faced the garden away from the house, and entry was by a door at the opposite end. The photograph shows it to be about 9 feet wide, and it was perhaps 12 feet long. In 1949 Ben built what we called a "Summerhouse" onto the windows end, of the same width and about 5 feet long, glazed at the sides and with hinged French windows opening onto the lawn. He must have had help to build the original workshop, and it might be that Kenneth Littleddyke, one of his very able pupils, assisted him. Kenneth became a handicraft teacher, in particular at The Royal Masonic School at Bushey in Hertfordshire. After my mother vacated the house in 1988, the new owners replaced Ben's wooden Workshop with a brick building of similar size.

When I bought a house which has an orchard as part of the garden, we needed a fruit



Figure 55: Cheval mirror



Figure 56: Chest of four drawers



Figure 57: Garden seat with Nora, Michael and Ben in February 1936



Figure 58: Michael with David Neal on the garden seat in April 1936



Figure 59: The Workshop in 1948

store to keep some of our fruit during the “mists and mellow fruitfulness” of autumn. Ben made such a thing, having six 2’1” by 1’5” plywood shelves supported within a pine frame 3’11” high, and it shown in Fig. 60.

17 Bookcases

I married Bridgid Mowll in 1960, just after I had been appointed as Assistant Lecturer in Mathematics at Nottingham University. We rented a furnished house for nine months, before buying our first house at 57 Bankfield Drive in Bramcote Hills, in time for our first son John to be born there on 21st May 1961. The house is fifteen minutes cycle ride from the University, and this one had to be furnished. In particular I needed a desk and bookcases at home, so that I could work there. I had inherited a very nice desk from one of Bridgid’s relatives. At that time my father made for us the first of a sequence of bookcases to my specification. It was a pair of pine bookcases, painted white, influenced in style by the one pictured in Fig. 42 which I had known since boyhood. This pair was intended to stand on each side of the desk which was placed in an upstairs bay window. Each one is 6’9” high, 1’6” wide and 8” deep. They are still in use in our present house. Fig. 61 shows one of them in an alcove.

Although my Nottingham appointment had been confirmed as Lecturer in 1962, I felt it time for a change in 1963. I had entered Nottingham University ten years before, as a Mining Engineering undergraduate in 1953, transferring in 1954 to begin a Mathematics B.Sc. course in 1954, and continuing in 1957 as a Ph.D. student in Applied Mathematics. So in 1963 we moved to 32 Queensholm Drive at Downend near Bristol. For the next three years I was a member of the Engineering Faculty at Bristol University, as Research Associate in Theoretical Mechanics. Richard was born just before this move, on 11th April 1963. More bookcase space was required to accommodate children’s books. I designed another piece to fit in an alcove, with shelved cupboard in the lower part, and open bookshelves in the upper part. Ben made it on site, and painted it cream. It was 6’6” high, 3’4” wide, and 9” front to back. The lower cupboard was eventually removed. The upper part continues to serve as the freestanding bookcase in our Reading house.

In 1966 I was appointed Reader in Applied Mathematics at Reading University, and we moved to 55 Wilderness Road adjoining the Whiteknights campus there, before moving again to 82 Shinfield Road in 1978, after my promotion to a Personal Professorship of Applied Mathematics in 1977. By then my father had made two more substantial oak bookcases for me, in a style which I requested, and stained more darkly than most of his pieces. One was similar to the early Grantham piece shown in Fig. 42, but such that the upper part was detachable at my request. For many years we used only the lower part, seen on the left in Fig. 62, in our lounge, so that a picture could hang above it, but recently we have reunited the halves as shown on the right. The other bookcase is a smaller one, 2’ wide, 2’9” high and 9” deep, with nicely dovetailed joints, which stands in my entrance hall as shown in Fig. 63, and serves well as a place to keep maps.

I designed another bookcase, having three shelves as shown in Fig. 64, to stand in our bedroom and carry some of our more favoured or older books, and Ben made this in



Figure 60: Fruit store



Figure 61: One of a pair of white bookcases



Figure 62: Bookcase with two halves



Figure 63: Bookcase with maps



Figure 64: Bedroom bookcase

varnished pine. He made yet another varnished pine bookcase at my request, having two shelves, each big enough to carry a dozen A4 box files. By this time I had even learned enough to make three more capacious pine bookcases for myself, which I did.

Ben also made a short single and inclined oak shelf, as seen in Fig. 65, designed to accommodate just a few books on a window sill or other small convenient place. It has been used in our garden summerhouse, perhaps for too many books.



Figure 65: Short bookshelf

18 Modelling

Ben Sewell developed, over a long period and especially in the 1930s and 1940s, a deep and practical interest in making models, including working models of aeroplanes in particular. He subscribed, over the years, to many magazines which catered for this kind of interest, such as *The Model Engineer*. My own earliest memories of this activity date from about 1941. During the War we often stayed at my maternal Richardson grandparents' house at West View on the A607 between Waltham-on-the-Wolds and Melton Mowbray, and I can remember my father flying his balsawood models powered by rubber bands in Sturton's 40-acre field across the road there. One of these aeroplanes is seen in Fig. 67, but this was by no means his first one. On 8th November 1934 he had a letter published in *The Model Engineer* which described the construction of a D.H. Moth biplane which "flies perfectly for 100-200 yards" and "has made some excellent landings" (see page 80 of "A Sewell Family History 1807 - 2007", and the upper left part of Fig. 66 here). This was clearly a handsome flying model, painted in crimson and cream, and photographed outside the side door of 26 Gorse Rise. Three more of his models from the 1930s are also shown in Fig. 66. The two in the upper right are in the back garden of 26 Gorse Rise, and the lower one is in the back living room. Ben also used petrol aeroengines, and he made castings of their parts himself, and the wooden propellers too. One of these is shown in Fig. 69. Ben made the steam engine with flywheel shown in Fig. 70. I still have a toy Spitfire which he made for me. This has a 6" wingspan and 5" fuselage, and it is shown in Fig. 68. It was not designed to actually fly, of course.

The Grantham Journal for 11th July 2007 published, in a nostalgia feature, an item from 1940 stating that pupils at the Boys' Central School had collected £5000 for National Savings, and quoted one of them, Terry Shelbourne, as saying that "Woodwork master Ben Sewell made a magnificent Spitfire with a four-foot wingspan which was parked at the main gate, to promote it". I knew nothing of this model until 2007. The savings target set by the Head Master Sam Thorp on that occasion was £1000, and £5000 was a huge response, enough to buy several houses in Grantham at that time. In later years at least, if not in 1940, Ben was responsible for the School's National Savings effort.

My father also made several model boats. One of these is the 3'3" long destroyer, painted grey, and shown in Fig. 71. The hull is made from five 1" deep wooden sections, glued together one upon the next, and shaped so that the interior is hollow. The deck and superstructure, including bridge, gun platforms, bridge and funnels, are made of steel or tin plate. He also made a yacht of similar size. Another of his models is the 1'10" long tugboat shown in Fig. 72, having a wooden deck and wheelhouse.

A different type of model is the Dolls' House shown in Fig. 73. Ben made this for his daughters Ann (born 1938) and Paula (born 1942), so it may date from about 1941. It is 2'6" wide, and 1'1" front to back, with a detachable front and plywood walls. The chimneys are 2' high. The front roof hinges upwards to provide attic storage, and the front wall detaches for ease of access.

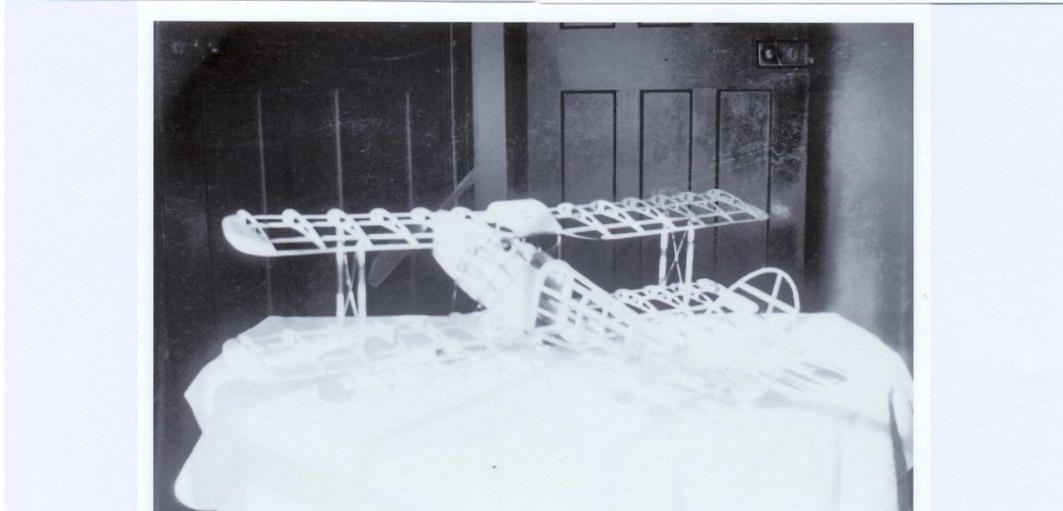
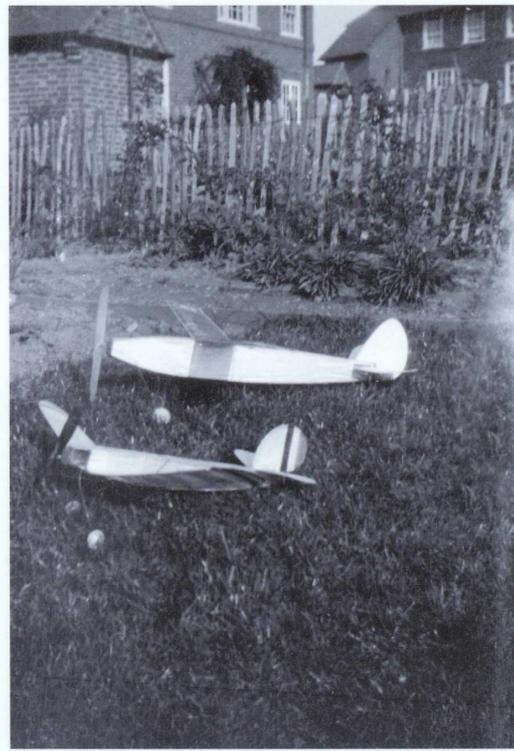


Figure 66: Four model aeroplanes



Figure 67: Balsawood aeroplane at West View, with Michael and Ann, 1941



Figure 68: Spitfire



Figure 69: Aero engine

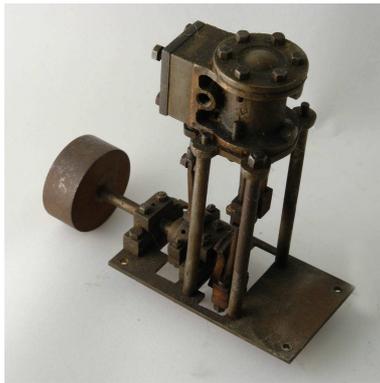


Figure 70: Steam engine with flywheel

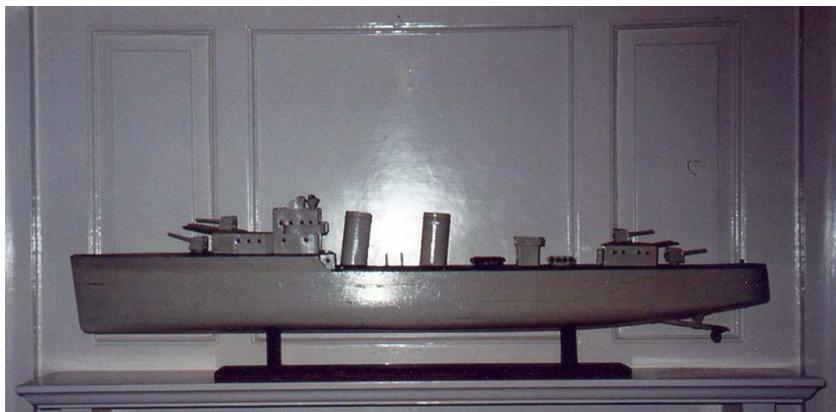


Figure 71: Destroyer



Figure 72: Tug boat



Figure 73: Dolls' House

19 Practical Skills Inherited

One of Ben Sewell's great-great-grandfathers was a carpenter called John Sewell living in Bourne (then called Bourn), 16 miles south-east of Grantham, in the early 1800s. John is named on the marriage certificate, dated 15th July 1847, of his son William, who was a schoolmaster and workhouse administrator in Bourn.

Ben's brother Cyril, born in 1902, also became a trained joiner like Ben, but not a schoolmaster. I did not inherit these practical skills from my father or my great-great-great-grandfather. I became a mathematician, using only paper and pencil, and something in my head, to pursue my trade as Professor of Applied Mathematics at Reading University. My three books are listed in the References at the end of this article, and my other publications in my website at the beginning. My sisters Ann and Paula both became artists, trained at the Slade School of Fine Art in University College London. This involved not only drawing and painting, but also sculpture as illustrated by Ann in the 1958 piece shown in Fig. 74. This photograph was taken by David Neal, who is seen at a younger age in Fig. 58. Very recently Ann has tried out wood carving in lime wood, illustrated in Fig. 75. Paula has made a peacock by topiary. The thread of practical craftsmanship emerged again in my sons John, Richard and Peter, who are Ben's grandsons. Ben had five grandsons and two grand-daughters in all; and six great-grandsons and four great-grand-daughters to date.

John, born in 1961, has a metallurgy degree from Sheffield University. He is a technical manager with a firm who make security key-pads. John has made a small panelled oak chest, shown in Fig. 76, to be his family's "secrets box", for keeping archive material.

Richard, born in 1963, is a freelance computing consultant, who has always been self-employed since leaving Oxford University with physics and computing science degrees. But he also has a serious workshop at home, for both woodwork and metalwork. This houses, in particular, the workbench which Ben used in his home workshop at 26 Gorse Rise. In 2001 Richard made for me, from 7/16" diameter steel rods, the garden ornament shown in Fig. 80. This was to my specification, and it is a mathematical smooth surface made up of straight lines, called a "cusp catastrophe". It is 2'7" high and 5'10" wide. I published an article about it called "Mathematics in the Garden" in December 2006 (see References). Richard designed and made, for his brother John in 2004, the two metal garden chairs shown in Fig. 81. For my birthday in 2006, Richard made the newspaper rack shown in Fig. 77.

In addition to his workshop, Richard has a sewing room in his house, with a large table and a sophisticated sewing machine as seen in Fig. 78. Among other things he makes large kites, and in 2005 he made for me the versatile and well-fitting waterproof anorak shown in Fig. 79. I wear it regularly. Also shown there is a shoulder bag having several compartments which Richard made for his mother, and which she uses all the time. Richard also makes jewelery.

Peter, born in 1967, is a Senior Lecturer in the Computing Laboratory at Cambridge University. One of his hobbies is also the making of jewelery, using gold and silver in particular, on the small scale required. An example is the mokume-gane pendant shown in Fig. 82.



Figure 74: Ann's 1958 sculpture



Figure 75: Ann's 2006 limewood carving



Figure 76: John's "Secrets Box"



Figure 77: Richard's paper rack



Figure 78: Richard sewing



Figure 79: Richard's anorak and shoulder bag

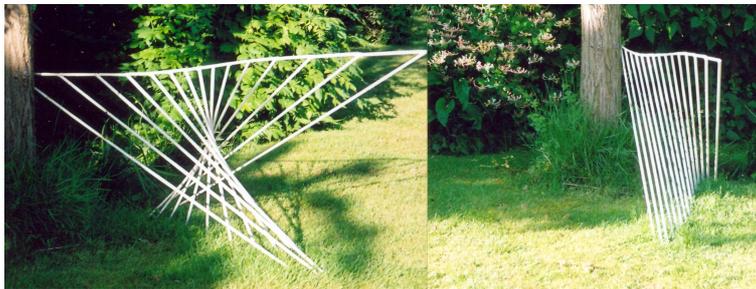


Figure 80: Richard's "cusp" of steel rods, from front and side



Figure 81: Richard's chairs



Figure 82: Peter's mokume-gane pendant

20 Cricket

As he tells us in *The Joiner's Tale*, Ben Sewell first began to learn the game of cricket during the lunch hour playtimes at Sedgebrook School before 1920. He then played at King's School, and he joined the Grantham Cricket Club in 1921 as a 15-year-old. I have all his membership cards from 1921 to 1947. Pages from the 1921, 1922 and 1934 cards are shown in Fig. 83. Two fixtures on the same day in 1921 refer to First and Second XIs. Ben was Captain of the Saturday Second XI from 1932 to 1935 inclusive. John Bullimore told Ben that he had seen cricket played on the London Road ground as early as the 1860s. I joined that Club as a 10-year-old in 1944. Not many years after that, the old pavilion was burnt down, with the loss of historic records. A supermarket now occupies the site, and that very pleasant setting of cricket and football grounds, lined by riverside trees on one side, has been lost.

Ben first went to the Nottinghamshire county ground of Trent Bridge in 1922. He cycled there from Grantham with Bob Austin in two and a half hours, and had to have a cotter pin repaired by the blacksmith at Bottesford on the way. They saw Bill Hicks make 50 in 11 scoring strokes, for Surrey against Notts in the time-honoured Whitsun fixture. Scorecards survive from Ben's many subsequent visits to Trent Bridge and other grounds to see famous players, including the one in Fig. 84. Ben took me to Trent Bridge many times, and Fig. 85 summarizes our visit to Lords to see the famous duo of Compton and Edrich in their brilliant season. We saw Bradman score a century there in the next year 1948. Thus Ben gave me a life-long interest in cricket, and I played regularly for 55 seasons from 1948 to 2002. I captained the King's School First XI in 1953, and the Reading University Academic Staff Cricket Club in 1978 - 1981. The latter Club is now over 50 years old, and

FIXTURES, 1921.

Date.	Club.	Ground.	Re- sults	Date.	Club.	Ground.	Re- sults.
May 5	Great Gonerby ..	..	Home	" 7	Croxton Kerrial ..	..	Away
" 7	Ruston & Hornsby ..	..	Home	" 9	Peterborough ..	..	Away
" 12	Spittlegate R.A.F. ..	..	Home	" 9	King's School ..	..	Home
" 12	Great Gonerby ..	..	Away	" 14	King's School ..	..	Home
" 14	Notts. Forest Amateurs..	..	Home	" 14	Kesteven Asylum ..	..	Away
" 19	Grantham XI. ..	..	Home	" 16	Bottesford ..	..	Away
" 21	Notts. Banks ..	..	Home	" 16	Belton Park ..	..	Home
" 21	Belton Park ..	..	Away	" 21	Peterborough ..	..	Away
" 26	..	..	..	" 21	..	..	..
" 28	Notts. Forest ..	..	Home	" 23	Notts. Banks ..	..	Away
June 2	King's School ..	..	Away	" 23	Barrowby ..	..	Home
" 2	Croxton Kerrial ..	..	Home	" 28	Old Stamfordians ..	..	Away
" 4	Peterborough ..	..	Home	" 28	Great Gonerby ..	..	Home
" 9	Sleaford ..	..	Away	" 30	Cranwell ..	..	Away
" 9	..	..	..	" 30	Hough-on-the-Hill ..	..	Home
" 11	Harmston Park ..	..	Home	Aug. 1	Harmston Park ..	..	Away
" 11	King's School ..	..	Away	" 4	Kesteven Asylum ..	..	Away
" 16	Lines. C.C. Trial Match..	..	Home	" 6	Newark ..	..	Away
" 18	Newark ..	..	Home	" 6	Great Gonerby ..	..	Home
" 18	Great Gonerby ..	..	Away	" 11	Grantham XI. ..	..	Home
" 23	Spittlegate R.A.F. ..	..	Home	" 13	Bottesford ..	..	Home
" 25	Egerton Park ..	..	Away	" 13	Stoke Rochford ..	..	Away
" 25	Stamford School ..	..	Home	" 18	Peterborough ..	..	Home
" 30	Lincoln ..	..	Away	" 30	Notts. Forest ..	..	Away
" 30	..	..	..	" 30	Stoke Rochford ..	..	Home
July 2	Cranwell ..	..	Home	" 25	Lincoln ..	..	Home
" 2	Barrowby ..	..	Away	" 27	Ruston & Hornsby ..	..	Home
" 7	Sleaford ..	..	Home	Sept. 8	Egerton Park ..	..	Home

Grantham Cricket Club.

SEASON 1922.

Captain:
MR. W. E. THOMPSON.

Vice-Captain (Saturday XI.):
MR. M. BROUGHTON.

Vice-Captain (Thursday XI.):
MR. M. W. APPLEBY.

Hon. Treasurer:
MR. W. E. THOMPSON.

Second XI.:
Captain: MR. A. MUSSON. Hon. Sec.: MR. S. T. CLARKE.

Committee:
MR. J. FILLINGHAM (Chairman),
MR. J. BENNETT, MR. E. CHALMERS,
" J. JENKINSON, " H. JOHNSON,
" A. AVELING, " S. F. NOTT,
" E. L. DAVIES, " P. J. WOOLHOUSE,
" E. ROBERTS, " H. P. CRAMER,
" W. W. WINN, " J. G. BENNETT

Secretary:
MR. F. E. TROTTER, 85, High Street.

Ground Sec.:
MR. M. W. APPLEBY.

Member's Name:
..... V. E. Sewell

SMAYTON AND SON, GRANTHAM

Hon. Club Captain—
MR. W. E. THOMPSON.

Captain Thursday XI.
MR. P. H. D. GOSDEN.

Vice-Captain, Thursday XI.
MR. E. L. PARKER

Captain, Saturday XI.
MR. MATT BROUGHTON.

Vice-Captain, Saturday XI.
MR. F. CULLEN.

Captain, Thursday 2nd XI.
MR. S. PULFORD.

Vice-Captain, Thursday 2nd XI.
MR. J. NIXON.

Captain, Saturday 2nd XI.
MR. V. E. SEWELL.

Vice-Captain, Saturday 2nd XI.
MR. H. O. SELLORS.

Hon. Match Secretaries—
Thursday 1st XI. ... MR. A. H. DEXTER.
Saturday 1st XI. ... MR. C. J. R. SMITH.
Thursday 2nd XI. ... MR. H. BASNETT.

Joint Hon. Treasurers—
Messrs. W. E. THOMPSON and H. C. LILE.

Hon. Ground Secretary—
MR. M. W. APPLEBY, 6, St. Catherine's Road.

Committee—
MR. J. G. BENNETT (Chairman).
MR. C. B. BAILEY, MR. E. ROBERTS
" W. J. HALL, " R. L. REDDISH
" T. W. HANSON, " G. W. SPRAWSON
" F. LAING, " J. C. B. THOMPSON
" J. S. MORLEY, " A. N. WEEKLEY
" B. PULFORD, " W. W. WINN

Secretary—
MR. C. PROWSE, 3, Albion Place.

Figure 83: 1921, 1922 and 1934 Grantham Cricket Club fixture cards

a history of its first 25 years was written by Giles (1983, see References).

21 Portrait

Fig. 86 shows a photograph of Ben Sewell taken in 1958.

22 Tools

A number of Ben's woodworking tools have survived, and some of the larger ones are shown in Fig. 87. The upper fretsaw actually has his elder brother Cyril's name C.J. Sewell stamped on it.

23 Hat

Ben Sewell cared about his clothes. He often wore a trilby hat, and Fig. 88 shows his last one.

24 Acknowledgements

Many of the photographs were taken by myself, but some were taken by other members of my extended family. I am pleased to acknowledge the help of my sisters Ann Garrard and Paula Napper, and their husbands Richard Garrard and Adrian Napper. I also thank their children James Garrard and Polly Hart (née Napper), my son Peter, and my cousin Stuart Amos, for providing photographs. Eventually more photographs were available than could be used without duplication.

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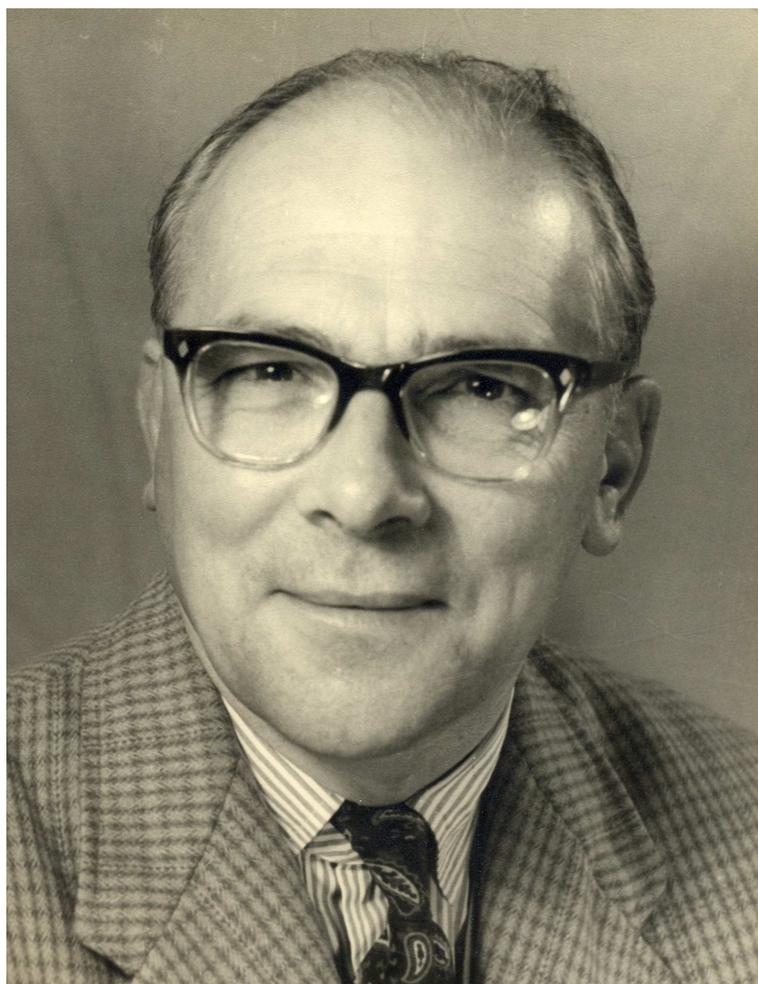


Figure 86: Ben Sewell in 1958

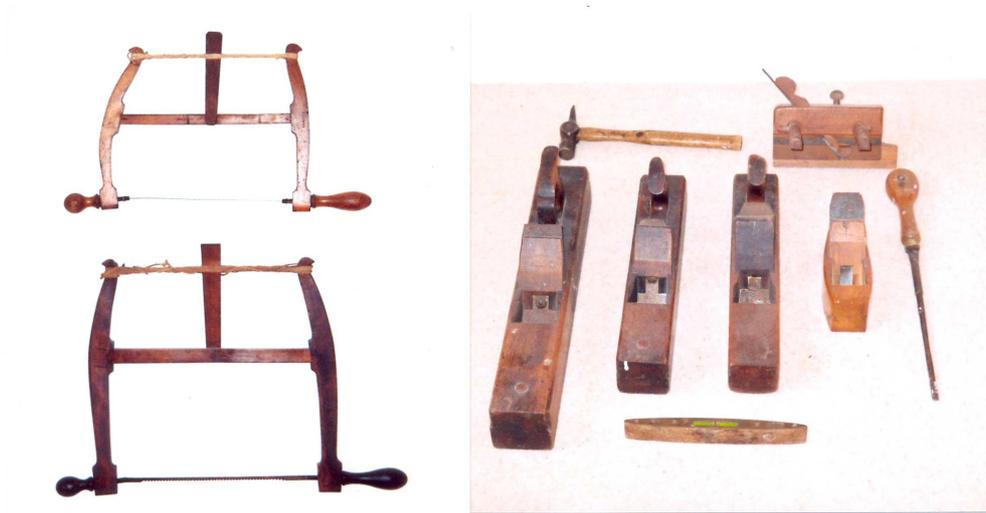


Figure 87: Some of Ben's tools



Figure 88: Ben Sewell's trilby hat

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