

THE HISTORY OF T C WATTS & SON, REAL ESTATE AGENTS OF BENDIGO.

BY EDITH LUNN. September 30th. 2000.

THOMAS COUCH WATTS was born in Bendigo on March 7th. 1865, the third son of Joseph Watts and his wife Susan whose family consisted of six daughters and three sons, another of whom was named Edward. Joseph and Susan Watts arrived in Victoria in 1858, having left Cornwall by the "Red Jacket" two weeks after their marriage.

They first settled in Ballarat where Joseph was employed as foreman in a foundry until he left to join a brother James who was already settled in Bendigo by 1860. The two brothers went into partnership and established the City Foundry in Wattle Street. However due to the ill health of Joseph the foundry was sold in 1870.

Very little is known about the fortunes of Joseph Watts and his wife Susan and their large family after the sale of the foundry. It would appear that the children received a good education. On leaving school, THOMAS COUCH WATTS left Bendigo and gained employment in Melbourne with the firm of Messrs G Robertson & Co. in a clerical position. He thus gained experience in the world of business and finance. On leaving this company, a presentation of a book was made to him by fellow employees.

Watts later returned to Bendigo in 1883 where he married Alice Maud Glasier, daughter of Thomas Glasier and his wife Emma, immigrants from Canada. Thomas Glasier conducted a picture framing business in Bath Lane, Bendigo.

Thomas and Alice had three children, Muriel, Edna and Raymond. They attended Forest Street Methodist Church. Mr Watts became a Freemason and was ultimately Master of the Golden and Corinthian Lodge. He was also a Lay Preacher in the Methodist Church.

For many years in his early married life, Thomas Couch Watts and his brother Edward were in partnership as booksellers and stationers in a shop at View Point. By this time, Thomas lived in a very fine house on a large block of land in Rowan Street, which they named "Ottawa", and which still stands today. There were also stables and accommodation for carriages and gigs, a feed store and yards for the two or three horses he kept for business purposes and private use.

It was only about ten years prior to his death in 1914 that Thomas Couch Watts began business on his account as a Real Estate Agent with a staff of three in a small office in View Street next to the Princess Theatre. He was then 39 years of age. His daughter Edna was the typist and bookkeeper,

Stewart Watson was the salesman and Stanley Phillips Bishop (my father) joined Mr. Watts as property manager and valuer. Mr Ray Watts was in Melbourne studying Accountancy. Added to the duties of Mr Bishop, who with his family lived next door to the Watts home in Rowan Street, was the care and preparation of the horses and vehicles for business each day. By this means prospective clients for the rental or purchase of houses were taken on inspection.

Doing "the rent rounds" were conducted by the same means, until cars became a more modern mode of transport, around the 1920's.

T. C. Watts died suddenly in October 1914. Because his studies in Accountancy were still unfinished, Ray Watts did not return to take over his father's business. It was not until 1917, having become a qualified accountant and auditor that he came back and assumed control and the firm was then named T. C. Watts & Son. In the meantime it had been ably carried on by his sister, Edna, whose business acumen and flair for mathematics had been inherited from her father, and with the assistance of the dedicated staff.

Edna remained in the business until her marriage to staff member, Stewart Watson in 1918. In the early 1920's, a move to bigger premises was made to Pall Mall at the entrance to the Mining

Exchange (later Allan's Walk). Mr George W Earl was engaged as Auctioneer and Don Greig as general clerk. Soon after, for health reasons, Mr Ray Watts relinquished his interest in the firm, and it passed into the hands of S P Bishop and G W Earl, who for some years, continued to trade on in the name of

T C Watts & Son.

In 1926 yet another move was made to even bigger premises in Mitchell Street, next to Matchett's the grocer in the City Club Hotel buildings on the corner of Bath Lane.

T C Watts & Son became well known and were very popular for their auctioneering, whether properties or furniture, large estates or small. In their auction rooms above the Mitchell Street office, furniture sales were conducted at regular intervals. George Earl was an excellent auctioneer. On the days of sales at the Auction Rooms, a big red banner with "Auction Sale" in large white letters would be displayed across the verandah posts of the building and Don Greig would ring the Auction bell to announce the commencement of the sale,

Surplus lots of furniture and effects from deceased estates were the main items for sale or private individuals could reap some monetary gain from unwanted household goods. They were busy days at the office and after moving to this address in Mitchell Street, staff numbers had increased. Among them was Mr Bishop's daughter being engaged as assistant general clerk. When she left to be married in 1939, Miss June Parry took her place. June later became secretary of the Bendigo Historical Society.

During the days of the Depression in the 1930s, along with most businesses, business became very competitive and in some firms, staff were put on decreased salaries until the economic climate changed for the better.

Eventually the name of the business was changed to that of Bishop & Earl and remained popular in the Real Estate world for many years, until Mr Bishop died in 1951. After Mr Earl passed a few years later, the business was conducted by another firm and eventually absorbed into it.

Thomas Couch Watts was buried in the Bendigo Cemetery on October 30th. 1914.

MR. T. C. WATTS. RESPECTED CITIZEN DIES.

The Bendigo Independent (Vic. : 1891 - 1918) Friday 30 October 1914 p 3 Article Illustrated



Bendigo Independent 21 May 1896

Dissolution of Partnership Notice

Partnership between T C WATTS and Thomas S GLASIER, under the name of Glasier and Watts, picture framers and guilders, Mitchell Street Bendigo, dissolved as from 19 May 1896.

Bendigo Advertiser 30 October 1914

DEATH OF MR. T. C. WATTS. WELL-KNOWN AUCTIONEER.

One of the best-known auctioneers in Bendigo, in the person of Mr. Thomas C. Watts, died at his residence, "Ottawa" Rowan-street about 8 o'clock on Thursday morning. Although Mr. Watts had been unwell for the past few days, it was not anticipated that there was any likelihood of his illness taking a serious turn, and the end came with dramatic suddenness.

The deceased gentleman had an attack of influenza some weeks ago, and seemed unable to shake the effects of it off. He went to Melbourne on Saturday to give evidence in connection with the appeal against the Clerks' Wages Board award.

He was taken ill at his lodging in Melbourne on Sunday, but – with characteristic determination he fulfilled the mission for which he proceeded to the metropolis, and gave his evidence although not at all well. He was in the witness box for two hours and had to be accommodated with a seat.

He returned to Bendigo by the express train on Monday night, and on arrival home went straight to bed. Dr. P. J. Rockett was called in on Tuesday morning, but nothing serious was apprehended.

On Wednesday evening about 6.30 o'clock he took a serious turn, and died next morning, the cause of death being influenza and bronchial pneumonia. Mr. Watts was passionately attached to his home and family. A widow, two daughters and one son, all of whom are grown up and living at home, are left to mourn the loss of a model husband and father.

The late Mr. Watts was only 49 years of age, and was a native of Bendigo. He had lived here all his life and married Miss A. M. Glasier. For many years he was in partnership with his brother, Edward, as booksellers and stationers, at "The Argus" news agency, at View Point.

After this he undertook several other agencies, and entered upon the auctioneering business about ten years ago. By his sterling character, his upright dealings with clients, and all with whom he had transactions, and his fine business capacity, he built up a most successful business. Recently he had taken an active interest in municipal affairs, but his chief interest was centred in Masonic matters. He had been a Mason for about ten years, and had passed through all the offices. Two years ago he was elected Worshipful Master of the Golden and Corinthian Lodge. Some years ago he took a leading part in connection with the Methodist Church, but for the past five or six years he had done splendid work in the Church of England. He was one of the honorary lay readers of St. Paul's, and took a keen interest in parochial matters.

He was much liked in the city, and was highly respected and esteemed by all who knew him. He did a great deal of good in an unostentatious manner. Many people called at his late residence yesterday to express their sympathy with the widow and family. One of the first to visit the house was the Very Rev. Dean MacCullagh, who was much surprised and upset by the news of the death of one of his loyal helpers.

The funeral, which will be a full Masonic funeral, will be held at 4pm today to the Bendigo Cemetery.