

WORLE HISTORY SOCIETY

Fussell's Rubber Co. Ltd.

Working in Worle

Raye Green

November, 2010

www.worlehistorysociety.net

This booklet briefly follows the early history of the company and its prominent people. It covers all aspects of the firm's contribution to Worle life. I have drawn upon the June 1955 edition of 'British Shoeman', local papers and information from the Fussell and Champion families to bring it as up to date as possible.

Late in 2009 I found myself seated in the workmanlike office at Baytree Road Garage, begging Julian to be kind to my little car and give it an M.O.T. for another year. On a shelf above the desk I spotted an old building brick, with 'Fussells' Rubber Co.' written on the side. Naturally, I asked Julian why he had a brick from Fussells, and that's how all this started.

As Julian said, earlier today, 'good job you're nosey'. I had had no idea that Julian's surname was Fussell, or that his grandfather, H. J. Fussell, was one of the founders of the firm that was so much at the centre of life in Worle for much of the 20th century.

I told Julian about Worle History Society, and between us we hatched a plot to involve Julian's brother, Michael and Hugh Champion in an evening meeting, celebrating the old firm. As it turned out, Julian's son Stephen came along to share the evening, too.

The material we all cobbled together seemed too good to waste, and thus this little book was written and illustrated as a lasting memorial for everyone who worked for Fussells or had friends and family working there. Please enjoy it.

Raye Green

The first ideas

It is remarkable how often the name 'Fussells' has been mentioned down the years in response to ordinary questions. Who do you work for? Which cricket team do you play for? Who gave you that Christmas Hamper? Who is your landlord? Which football studs do you use? Which sports club did you say you'd joined?

With so many activities to remember, it is easy to forget that the prime aim of the company was supposed to be the invention, manufacture and sale of products using the new and exciting material - rubber. Uncured natural rubber is sticky, easily deforms when warm, and is brittle when cold. In this state it cannot be used to make articles with a good level of elasticity, but by the early 20th century Charles Goodyear had discovered the vulcanization process and rubber had become the material of the future.

The Fussell story begins in the midst of World War 1. Not an auspicious time, you would think, but it didn't deter two brothers, Herbert J. Fussell and Ernest George Fussell from coming up with an idea. In 1916, they designed a rubber sole, which they called the 'Propeller Sole' and they patented it. This sounds so simple, but actually it shows amazing foresight. Quite apart from the great idea of using the new material to re-sole the nation's shoes and to manufacture new ones, the name is clever. Propellers, in 1916, meant aeroplanes, which meant modern, even futuristic. It actually suggested that it would enable you to walk faster. Brilliant. On top of that, they had the sense to patent it and thus protect their invention, a habit which they nurtured for the rest of their careers.

One wonders what inspired these two to come up with the idea in the first place. Herbert J. Fussell was born around 1880 and at 36 years was already an entrepreneur with a social

conscience and a tendency towards philanthropy. His younger brother, Ernest George, generally known as *George*, was 30. His great interests were carpentry, fretwork, and pattern making - and he was a salesman.



These photographs of Herbert J. [top] and *George* [below] show the two of them in middle age. They were very similar in looks and both had a gentle, kindly look about them.

In fact, H. J., the older brother, must have had considerable imagination and determination and *George* was creative. They were a good combination - like their heels - and used their strengths effectively to build up a business that sustained many Worle families throughout the rest of the century.

H.J. Fussell and Co. 1919

With the long awaited conclusion of the First World War, these Fussell brothers founded a new firm in the West

Country city of Bath. In 1919 they became partners in H. J. Fussell and Co. I don't know what happened to the Propeller, but their first patent following the formation of the firm was the 'Combinet Sole'. Apparently, this was a three part sole, but I must say now, that to someone untutored in the ways of footwear, it is a closed book. No illustrations seem to be available, so we shall have to use our imaginations. Close on the heels of the Combinet, came Spa Soles, Silent Night heels and Rubrox soles.

Herbert and George had definite thoughts on how a business should be run. Any expansion had to be followed by a period of consolidation before new ventures could be embarked upon. Thus, they never overstepped the mark. Orders were always met and products were of the highest quality. The Fussells and the firm were highly respected.

Nothing runs smoothly for ever, of course, and disaster struck on Saturday 24th November 1923, when fire destroyed their factory in Bath. Hugh Champion and Michael Fussell between them, were able to shed light on the conflagration by providing a copy of the article run by the Bath Chronicle which confirmed the year of the fire as 1923, not 1922 as was previously thought, and the date as 24th November. The five headlines, all in differing sizes and fonts, and a transcript of the article, follow.

BIG BLAZE IN BATH;
Rubber Works Burnt Out;
A ROARING FURNACE;
Fire Brigades Difficult Task;
THOUSANDS OF POUNDS OF DAMAGE.

During the early hours of Saturday the premises of Messrs H. J. Fussell and Co. manufacturers of indiarubber goods, of Locksbrook Road, were completely gutted by fire, a fire that lit up the whole neighbourhood and endangered other property close at hand.

It is stated that a resident passed by the factory at ten minutes past one and noticed nothing amiss. Less than half an hour later people awoke to view what has been described as a 'roaring furnace.'

The Bath Fire Brigade was summoned by telephone at 1.55, and at eight minutes past one the firemen were playing upon the fire which had secured a firm hold upon the premises. About 20 members of the Brigade nearly the full complement - promptly responded to the call upon their services, the seriousness and extent of the fire induced Chief Officer England to bring into use the old motor pump as well as the new one.

The factory, of which Mr. H. J. Fussell, of 78, The Triangle, is the proprietor, is situated almost in the corner of a right-angle formed by the junction of Locksbrook with Avondale Road. Its position is only located with difficulty being sandwiched [the paper's spelling, not mine] between the Avon Manufacturing Woodwork Company's factory, which has frontage in Locksbrook and the Locksbrook Timber Mills. It is approached by a short roadway. It can be understood at once that the fire broke out in a highly flammable quarter, and it is fortunate that the night was a calm one. HAD A WIND BEEN BLOWING THE OFFICIALS OF THE TIMBER MILLS ARE OF THE OPINION THAT THE FIRE WOULD SURELY HAVE SPREAD TO THEIR BUILDINGS, WHILE THE RESIDENTS OF ONE SIDE OF Avondale Road, whose houses are only a few yards away, are equally glad that the flames were not blown in their direction.

FIGHTING THE FLAMES

Chief Officer England told a 'Chronicle' reporter at the scene of the fire on Saturday that the building - a long, narrow structure of two storeys - was well alight when the Brigade

arrived. The roof was blazing and the top story had fallen in. The top storey was used as a store-room, and when the floor collapsed hundreds of pairs of rubber heels and rubber mats mixed with the burning debris below and helped to feed the flames and create an overpowering smell of burning rubber! The timber mills are upon higher ground than the scene of the fire and from a point of vantage the firemen directed a strong jet of water in the very heart of the flames. The motor pumps worked excellently, and from the time of arrival until half-past eight they pumped between them 800 gallons a minute from the nearby canal. Water was also used direct from the main. The Brigade concentrated their efforts upon that part of the blazing building nearest to the houses, but it was only after difficulty and no little danger that members of the Brigade gained a position from which the flames could be most effectively dealt with.

Mr. England is of the opinion that the fire originated in the room which contained the raw rubber.

A Scene of Ruin

Our representative, who paid a visit of inspection on Saturday, found several members of the Brigade still engaged in extinguishing a few obstinate flames that persisted in odd corners. With the exception of a few charred spars at one end, the roof has completely disappeared, and the limestone walls bear traces of intense heat.

The ground floor was a scene of desolation. One walked over inches deep of congealed rubber still smouldering and lumps of charred wood. Rubber heels, still attached to their cards were to be seen in profusion, and prettily designed rubber mats looked sadly out of place amid such confusion. Some pieces of machinery still remained unperturbed, but other pieces had been twisted and scarred by the heat. The gas engine, or what remained of it, was partly covered with rubbish, while the flywheel leant against the wall, sadly out of shape.

Several buildings did not escape, and a large number of empty oil barrels which had been stored in a lean-to, must have added

to the conflagration in no small degree. We understand that the amount of damage exceeds £3,000 and is only partly insured. The firm was doing good business, but the unfortunate occurrence has thrown 16 employees out of work. Rubber heels and mats formed the principal manufactures and the raw material was stored on the ground floor. The company commenced business four years ago, the premises being adapted to the needs of a factory. The walls are at least a foot thick and Mr. England told our representative that the beams were of prodigious thickness.

Mr. R. Ashman, the Secretary of the Company, who lives at 7, Avondale Road, states that the origin of the fire was a perfect mystery, 'I left the premises at seven o'clock', he said to our representative, and then everything was in order. I was the last to leave. At 2 o'clock I was awakened by my parents who had seen the glare of the fire and heard the commotion. I immediately proceeded to the works and found the place in flames'.

A word of praise is due to the firemen who worked throughout the night unceasingly. Even 'No. 22', the Brigade's terrier mascot, turned out promptly when the call came, and on Saturday, he was pottering contentedly over the ruins looking very black and grimy but not in the least tired after being out all night.

Upon inquiry at Mr. Fussell's residence, Mrs. Fussell informed us that stock of great value had been destroyed and quite recently new machinery had been installed to meet the demand of increased business. Her husband, she said, started the business when he left the R.A.F. four years ago, and had worked unremittingly to make it a success. He had been in the rubber trade for some years, and previous to the war resided at Radstock.

The fire must have been a devastating blow, but they recovered. Quite probably their careful approach paid off, and there was sufficient goodwill and funds to see them through. They

survived and, later the same year they moved, lock, stock and barrel to Station Road in Worle, where they resumed business in the premises formerly occupied by the old gas works.

Early years in Worle



This picture of Station Road was probably taken just before the First World War, and before Fussells arrived. The photographer is facing north towards the High Street. The premises of the Imperial Laundry can be seen in the middle distance, but the rural nature of the area is obvious. The boy pushing the cart is George Fry, a well known local character. In her book, 'Around Weston-super-Mare in Old Photographs' Sharon Poole suggests that he may have been heading for the Gas Works to collect coal. The site of the old gas works is out of sight, behind the camera to the right side of the road. George Fry was going to have to push his cart over the Railway Lines that carried the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway.

To the Fussells, searching for somewhere new to set up this must have presented a contrast to Bath. It seems possible

that the low price of buying or renting property encouraged them, and what a good thing it was for Worle.

Worle's Old Gas Works



The general consensus suggests that this picture was taken very early in the 20th century. The works were situated where Fussell's Court apartments now stand and covered the ground

where the entrance to the recreation ground still is.

A brief chat with Brian Austin provided some background information about the provision of gas in Weston and Worle, as follows:

1841 Weston gas works were in Oxford Street/Union Street, on the site of the Friends Meeting House.

1852 This site was replaced by one which served 42 lamps and 42 houses, where Somerset House now stands,

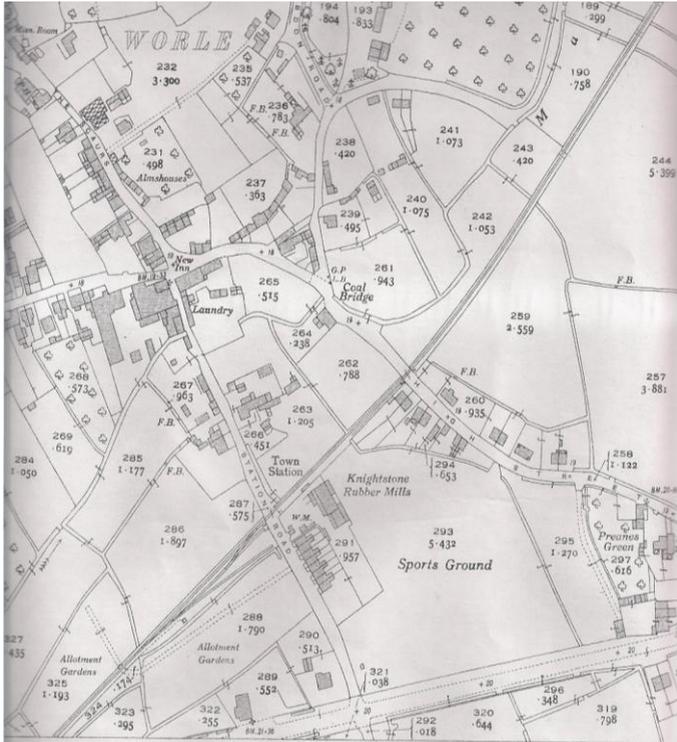
1856 The Gas Works at Somerset House site closed and the machinery was sold following the Gas Light Act. The present Drove Road site was completed at cost of £3,191.

1900 Drove Road site was extended

1935 Gas company was renamed 'Weston and District' Gas Company.

As yet it is not possible to be certain, but it seems probable that the Worle Gas Works were decommissioned following the Drove Road extension, so were available for Fussell's to take over in 1923.

The map is from the mid 1930s and should help us to clarify matters. The building labelled 'Knightstone Rubber Mills'



[Fussell's] is that pictured on page 10, featuring the small round window and the arched windows. I have it on good authority, from Hugh Champion, that when the larger premises were built, the original gas works buildings were left intact, inside the new factory, windows and all.

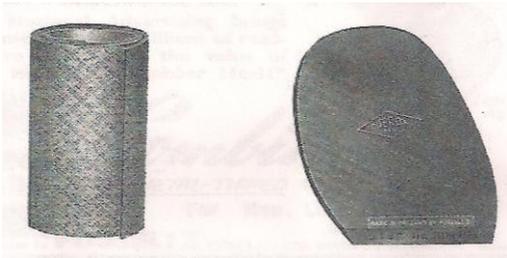
Also clearly visible on the map are the eight cottages that made up Sprake's Terrace. The proximity of the Light Railway line and station will also be worth recalling.

A Change of Name

Now that we understand where H. J. Fussell and Co. settled we have to adjust to another change. A decision was made for the partnership to become a Limited Company. The registration was completed at Company House on 4th November 1924, with the brothers becoming directors. The registration number, 00201475, still stands.

The main business was rubber soles and heels and the most important product in those days was 'Rubrox' which was sold in half soles, long soles and sheets. H. J. Fussell, throughout those early years was careful to keep an eye on costs. He told the 'British Shoeman' that he purchased material for the factory at 2d a lb, which later escalated in price to 6 shillings - a massive 36 fold increase. Thus his firm belief in 'waste not, want not'.

This careful approach did not prevent them from inventing new products, and the Wizard 1,000 mile sole was introduced as just one of many new lines.



These are two of the lines upon which the firm was founded - Rubrox sheeting and half-soles in the well known plaid pattern.

Despite their sensible, but pioneering approach, these were difficult times. Boom and bust was a force to be dealt with in the 1920s, and added to that the public had not really woken up to the advantages of rubber. Fussells worked hard on personal attention to customers' needs, so that shoe repairers came to know that they could be relied upon for quality and

punctuality. A revolving heel was a best seller, as people were keen to get the maximum mileage out of their footwear.

Fussells and Football

Who came up with the great idea in 1932, I wonder? The rubber studs for football boots, 'Rubstuds' were born. They were quickly patented, improved, and patented again. And the marketing was magnificent. Fussell's team sheets were sent out to hundred of amateur football clubs all over the country. The Rubstud team sheet penetrated the psyche of thousands of keen players nationwide. This brought attention to the versatility of rubber, not to mention cutting down on sporting injuries. Perhaps it was this that prompted the firm to 'think sport' for its employees.



<p>A. W. J. HUISH Kinberley Coronation Road Worle Haulage Contractor Phone 4946</p>	<p>COME AND DISCUSS TODAY'S REVOLT OVER A GLASS OF GROUP'S BEER WITH PLEASANT COMPANY AT H.Q. THE OLD KING'S HEAD Moor, near J. P. WILSON.</p>	<p>T. T. BOND BUILDER AND DECORATOR EDDOR ROAD WORLE GENERAL HOUSE REPAIRS ESTIMATES FREE CONCRETE BLOCK MAKER Phone 1, Weston 1977</p>	<p>F. H. HIPPEN & SONS LTD. HIGH STREET Phone 208 WORLE Builders Decorators Plumbers Ironmongers Etc. We have a large range of Hardware, Paints, etc.</p>																																															
<p>CLUB NOTES. Today we have much pleasure in welcoming newcomers to our ground in R.A.F. Watford in the Semi-final of the Somerset Charity Cup. The R.A.F. team are top of Division II of the League with a fine record and look for promotion this season so our lads will have to be really on their toes. Only regular missing today is Dave Adams who was married last Saturday and I am sure all supporters will wish him the very best of luck and success congratulations there our lads have again four weeks ago we have only played one League match against Old Downe and our Saturday and we had a high-scoring victory by 7-1. Prospects to this we value R.A.F. Watford twice, leading them first of all in the replay of the Somerset Charity Cup match, 3-2 and again the next Saturday in the Somerset Charity Cup by 2-0. This last victory also put us in the Semi-final of the Somerset Cup and we meet old rivals, Truro, in the next Saturday on our ground. It is very encouraging to do so well in these Cup tournaments as we have just put in all four, unfortunately, it means a heavy League programme at the end of the season.</p>	<p>20th March, 1955. SOMERSET CHARITY CUP SEMI-FINAL. K.O. 3 p.m.</p> <p>WORLE OLD BOYS. GREEN AND WHITE.</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>1</td> <td>B. HILL</td> <td>3</td> <td>D. URCH</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4</td> <td>R. WILLIAMS</td> <td>5</td> <td>W. DUNSTON</td> </tr> <tr> <td>7</td> <td>J. HERRIES</td> <td>8</td> <td>T. HUTCHINGS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>9</td> <td>R. HUMPHRIES</td> <td>10</td> <td>K. LANE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>11</td> <td>K. RODGERS</td> <td>12</td> <td>L. HEART</td> </tr> <tr> <td>13</td> <td>REFEREE: S. A. MOODY, GHEDAR</td> <td>14</td> <td>K. TUCKER</td> </tr> <tr> <td>15</td> <td>LOCKEY</td> <td>16</td> <td>LINESMEN: F. G. WALKER, B. FORDIE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>17</td> <td>BULLET</td> <td>18</td> <td>KENDALL</td> </tr> <tr> <td>19</td> <td>GRAYSON</td> <td>20</td> <td>WILLIAMS</td> </tr> <tr> <td>21</td> <td>J. MANTING</td> <td>22</td> <td>HARNES</td> </tr> <tr> <td>23</td> <td>LEFT</td> <td>24</td> <td>HODGE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>25</td> <td>RIGHT</td> <td>26</td> <td>WATSON</td> </tr> </table>	1	B. HILL	3	D. URCH	4	R. WILLIAMS	5	W. DUNSTON	7	J. HERRIES	8	T. HUTCHINGS	9	R. HUMPHRIES	10	K. LANE	11	K. RODGERS	12	L. HEART	13	REFEREE: S. A. MOODY, GHEDAR	14	K. TUCKER	15	LOCKEY	16	LINESMEN: F. G. WALKER, B. FORDIE	17	BULLET	18	KENDALL	19	GRAYSON	20	WILLIAMS	21	J. MANTING	22	HARNES	23	LEFT	24	HODGE	25	RIGHT	26	WATSON	<p>never met as we have an outstanding chance in the League Championship it is quite a problem, we still have twelve League games to play but I feel sure that with the skill backing of fifteen of our team and supporters we stand more than a good chance of gaining it all. The end XI although still with the leaders of the League have dropped back a little having dropped three out of the last eight goals. Also the old XI who have recently had to suffer a lot from players called upon for the other sides, have probably lost their chance of the League title when losing in successive weeks to Winscombe and R.A.F. but this eleven are more than doing their job in having steady performances and the solid defence and encouraging and playing youngsters, so we hope they will not be disappointed. Towards the end of the season all eleven will be having quite a number of evening matches and we hope all our supporters will try to come along on these nights.</p> <p>FIXTURES: Saturday, 2nd April 1st XI Somerset Subsidary Cup (semi-final) vs. Truro (Home) 3.15 p.m. 1st XI vs. West Point, Away.</p>
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<p>TRIPP BROS. PURE MILK & CLOTTED CREAM GURENSIE MILK A SPECIALITY DAIRY FARMERS SUTWELL DAIRY HIGH STREET WORLE</p>	<p>RUBSTUDS THE PERFECT FOOTBALL STUD worn and recommended by leading International Players including— BILLY STEEL, SAM BARTRAM, TOMMY LAWTON, JACKIE SEWELL Supplied by Shoe Repairers and Sports Houses Made by Fussell's Rubber Co. Ltd</p>	<p>FOR ALL— SPORTS EQUIPMENT JOHN MOORE SUTWELL CRO. HIGH STREET WESTON-SUPER-MARE also at BATH</p>	<p>SHOPPING at the COOP Saves a GOOD DEAL Compare prices and the "COOP" often is "the" money. IT COSTS NOTHING TO BECOME A MEMBER. You can join at any grocery branch at the Administrative Office, Castle Green.</p>																																															

This great new invention coincided nicely with the founding, in 1934, of Worle Old Boys Football club. The club

produced a programme every week, whether the matches were home or away and without fail Fussell's inserted an advertisement for the Rubstuds.

The W.O. B.'s programme comes from much later, 1955, in fact, but it warrants publication if only because Brian Clough [circled] was on the opposing side. Rubstuds, Worle Old Boys and Brian Clough on a single sheet - miracles do happen.

A REMINDER !
When your Boots or Shoes require Repairs, there is nothing so equal
" RUBROX "
REG.
THE SUPER SOLING MATERIAL
Our
" SILENT KNIGHT " Heels
" WIZARD " Soles
" PRO-GOLF " Soles, etc.
are
The Aristocrats of the Trade
made only by
FUSSELL'S RUBBER Co., Ltd.
Worle, Weston-super-Mare.

FUSSELL'S
RUBBER WORKS,
WORLE.
SPORTS CLUB
Cricket Fixtures, 1936.
President
H. J. FUSSELL, Esq.
Vice-Presidents:
Messrs. H. DEBENARD
R. F. ASHMAN
MRS. MAGGS
Captains: C. H. CLIFF
Vice-Captain: A. STOCKER
Hon. Secretaries: R. F. ASHMAN, Phone 473.
Hon. Treasurer: D. W. DAVIES, Phone 1835.
GROUND ADJACENT WORKS, WORLE.

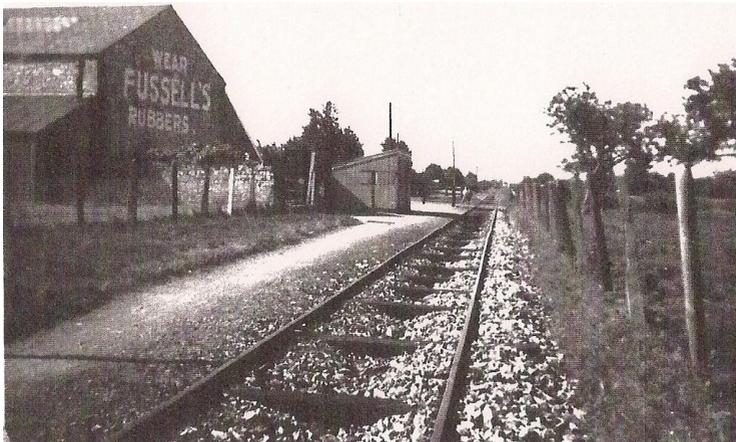
Fussell's did not stop at the connection with football, however. They formed Fussell's Sports Club, which provided their managers and employees with an opportunity to enjoy a social life that was also healthy. Named amongst the club's vice-presidents are two folk worthy of special mention. R. F. Ashman was Company Secretary back in 1923, at the time of the fire, and was mentioned in the newspaper report at that time. Presumably, he must have moved to Worle 'with the job', since it was no mean feat to travel from Bath at that time. This is certainly an early hint at the longevity of employment which became, and still is, the hallmark of Fussells. Mrs. Maggs, another vice-president, was almost certainly the mother of Eric Maggs who later became

the backbone of Worle Old Boys. It is likely that she worked for Fussells in some capacity.

The pamphlet from 1936 also confirms that Fussell's sported a Cricket eleven and we are fortunate to have this photograph of Fussell's cricket team. Both the Fussell family and Hugh Champion



have lovely clear copies of this, but it is difficult to scan successfully as it is mounted on a large, impressive board.



All these products were advertised at every opportunity. This dear old photograph, with its remarkable advertising slogan

shows the proximity of the factory to the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead Light Railway line. The photographer is facing south west, towards Weston.

Claude B. Champion, Esq.

By 1935, H. J. had reached the grand old age of 54 and started to think about slowing down a bit. Accordingly, he took on an assistant, Mr. Claude B. Champion, who gradually took over some of the heavier responsibilities. This photograph shows us a gentleman, very much of his time, with a distinct look of Anthony Eden about him. He was looked upon as the younger generation, being only 21 years of age at the time of his appointment. His first task was to learn the business inside-out and he was so successful in this that in 1937 he was made a director of the firm, in which capacity he was to undertake the internal re-organisation and reconstruction of the factory.



In the meantime, the Second World War had to be contended with. Soon after the declaration of war in September 1939 the firm held a meeting to decide upon strategy. An entry in the minutes dated Saturday 30th September, 1939 and numbered Minute 795 reads as follows: *'The meeting ratified the chairman's instructions to the secretary to withhold payment of dividends as detailed in minute no. 790, until further notice. This circumstance having arisen through the outbreak of war between Great Britain and Germany.'* The dividend due to be paid would have been 10% on Issued Share Capital, which in June 1939 stood at 4,254 shares.

As with all businesses, Fussells had to deal with the loss of trained personnel from the payroll. Many of the younger men were called up to duty in the armed services and it was the older men and the women who had to keep the company going for almost seven years. There was also a marked reduction in the availability of raw materials and a shortage of spares for plant and machinery. As well as needing personnel, the armed services were also in need of boots for its army to march on, and Fussells supplied all the soles and heels the army ordered. Most of their civilian business was done with shoe repairers, who also had to be supplied in an attempt to keep the nation on its feet, if not on its toes. Their determination and tenacity has to be admired. The company ploughed on and never let their customers down.

Quite apart from the strains of running the business at such a difficult time, H. J. Fussell carried on his activities in the community. High on the list amongst these was the Worle Old Age Pensioners' Christmas Gift Scheme, of which H. J. was the prime mover. The scheme had been running for some years, as a look at the local papers for successive years confirms, and in the run up to Christmas 1939, H.J. set about organizing it as usual. The best way to describe what this entailed is to use H. J.'s own words, as reproduced in the Mercury on 10th February, 1940:

Mr. H. J. Fussell writes as follows:

'May I, through the medium of your columns, express on behalf of the Committee of the Worle Old Age Pensioners' Christmas Gift Scheme, my sincere thanks for the grand co-operation of all concerned in making this year's collection a greater success than ever?'

'The black-out made the work of the collectors very tedious, and the many wartime calls upon people's generosity caused anxiety as to the success of the scheme this year, but

the generous support of everybody showed that the British spirit can never be daunted.'

The total collected was £25/6/-d, the whole of which was distributed to sixty-two old-age pensioners of Worle, in the form of groceries and coal. Where the circumstances required it, actual cash was given. Generally speaking, each case received goods to the value of 4/- or 5/- and coal to the value of 4/8d [i.e. 2 cwts].

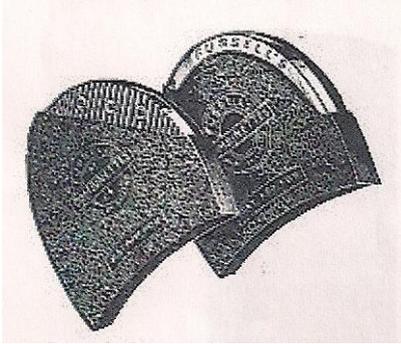
You have to hand it to that generation, they certainly pulled their weight. Sadly, the scheme was put on hold for the rest of the war, but H. J. still raised cash for the needy himself and donated what he could each Christmas to the most deserving cases amongst the elderly of Worle.

Post War Developments

1945 saw many, far reaching, changes. H. J. Fussell, the co-founder was suffering from ill health. He was, in fact the official retirement age of 65 in that year. Accordingly, he decided to hang up his well repaired boots. He handed over the Chairmanship of the Board to his younger brother, E. G. Fussell, who also carried on as Sales Director. Claude Champion, who had put in ten years magnificent service to that date, became Managing Director.

The labour situation eased as the male population returned from the continent. Although the supply of raw materials was still slow and unreliable, there was a feeling of optimism for the future. They used Nissen huts for storing materials as building licences were still in the future, and they constantly reviewed their working arrangements to meet customers' needs. Gradually Fussells received more enquiries from a broader area and business increased.

In 1948 there was a major break through. They patented the first 'Combinette' metal tipped rubber heel.



Illustrations of the two types of Combinettes - the metal tipped rubber heel - as published by the British Shoeman in 1955.

The great success of the Combinette led to eventual expansion. A new press shop was built with hydraulic presses, and all the boiler house equipment was renewed. The original boiler house chimney was in the centre of the factory, but they managed to renew it without disturbing production.



An advertisement from the British Shoeman in 1955. They obviously liked the name having used it once with a different spelling for the Combinet Sole.

Sprakes Cottages

A great deal could still be learnt from the example of the men in charge of Fussells Rubber Co. Ltd. In 1948 men were still returning from the war and struggling to adjust to civilian life and to support their families. This problem was recognised by Fussells' management and they found an unparalleled way to help. They bought the eight cottages that made up Sprakes Terrace in Station Road. Look at the front cover, the map and the aerial photograph for a clear idea of the location.

All the cottages were modernised, and, as they became vacant, they were given to employees, rent free accommodation, or for a minimal sum. It is little wonder that people stayed with Fussells for their entire working lives.

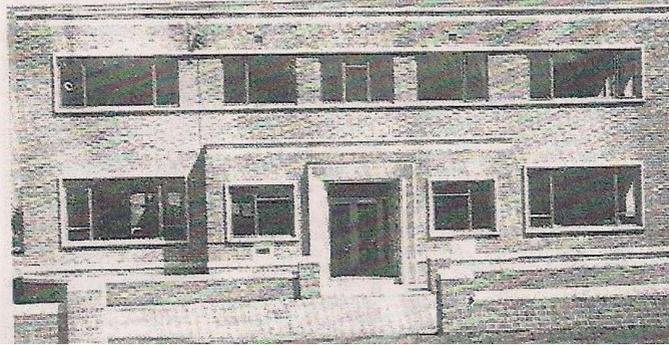
Several men who were members of Worle's Home Guard already lived in Sprakes Terrace in 1940. Rolf Rogers and his family lived at No. 1, Harry Burrows lived at No. 4 and Bill Perks inhabited No. 8. By 1956, these 3 families were still there, as were the Joneses, another family of Burrows, the Whites, the Biddiscombes and the Knights.

New Offices in the Art Deco Style

Office space had been something of an issue for several years, and the management at Fussells had long planned to build new facilities, but the post-war limitations on building had prevented this, until the mid 1950s.

An ultra-modern art deco style building had been designed and was just waiting for the go ahead. This came in 1954, when building immediately started, and was completed in March 1955. This caused a bit of a stir in the village, where stone from the local quarry was the usual building material. This new office block was red brick. Its strong horizontal lines were eye catching, to say the least and the interior was even

more interesting. No other office building in local experience possessed a sweeping staircase.



The official opening was carried out by the local Member of Parliament, Sir Ian Orr-Ewing, who said, in his opening remarks that he only wished his office in London could approach the same standard. A further piece of land was also acquired to provide easier exit and entry to the premises.

The 'Combinette' was updated to a design with a lighter tip and there were new Somerset heels and a new Silent Knight added to the range. Fussells were considered to be first class suppliers. The qualities encouraged by H. J. in the early days were still adhered to. Customers sometimes said the Quality was too good, and that Fussell's lines lasted too long! There was a constant search for products which would be a commercial success at a fair price and the Person Attention on which Fussells was founded was maintained.

Success was inevitable. The company's sales, which had once been centred entirely on the south of the country, by 1955 came from 'Lands End to Aberdeen' and Fussells exported to the Commonwealth, too, including New Zealand and Canada. This was, perhaps, Fussells' finest hour.

Memories of William Robert Arthur Knight

Last year I was fortunate to meet William Knight, who shared his memories with me of working at Fussell's. When I met him, William was a few months short of his 90th birthday, which he celebrated in January this year [2010].

As a boy of 14 years, William Knight went to work at Moody's Stores in Kewstoke Road, where he stayed for 3 years. Then, in 1937, he secured a job at Fussells, and there he stayed until he retired 46 years later, at the age of 63. William started in the Press Room and had only been working there for three days when he dropped a press on his foot and had to stay at home until he recovered. Home was not far away, as he lived at 7 Sprakes Cottages, which was yards from the factory.

When his foot had healed, William returned to work and heard almost at once that a Boiler Controller might be needed. Someone was planning to leave and put their feet up. He applied for the job, and was appointed, much to his amazement. Also in the boiler room at that time were C. H. Clift, E.E. Timbury and A. H. Bond [Jack], who all became trusted colleagues and friends. They all worked on the complicated process of switching the boiler to a modern, automatic system. Between them, these four men totted up 177 years service at Fussells. William remembers that Ted Timbury controlled the dispatch section, but announced one day in 1970 that he was retiring. Mr. Claude Champion offered the post to William Knight, who was then 50 years old, and accepted happily.

William took full advantage of the social aspects of working at Fussells and was a valued member of Fussells' Cricket Team, for whom he kept wicket. I expect he features in the team photograph, but this **needs confirmation**.

Later, still working in the despatch section, William injured his abdomen lifting butter boxes full of heels, and was

off sick, 'under the doctor'. The medical advice was to stop lifting and so, at the age of 63, William retired. That was in 1983.

Times change, as we all know, and William particularly mentioned the altered nature of local employment with the opening of Clark's Factory in Locking Road. The new factory was looking for skilled men and many people were tempted to make the move.

The Rubber Industry in the later years of the 20th Century

The industry was changing, as Hugh Champion explained. In the early years after the war the British people were still inclined to take great care of their possessions and to make them last. This applied to footwear. We all remember our fathers



and grandfathers mending our shoes. Every shed had an array of lasts to help with the work and a stock of replacement soles and heels. Failing granddad, the local cobbler was the preferred

destination - in Worle, that meant Mr. Smith in the High Street.

Before the war and for a good while afterwards, there were many firms in the country which were wholesalers of goods for repairing shoes. They sold leather and grindery products in line with the fashions and expectations of the time. People wore formal shoes to work during the week and always on Sundays. The idea of turning up in the office or at Church in more casual attire was unthinkable, and shoes were built to last, as long as they were properly repaired. Gradually rubber took over from leather and enjoyed a heyday of popularity for a couple of decades in the mid 20th century.

So when and why did we stop repairing our shoes? Fashion seems to be largely to blame. The rapid change in what was acceptable footwear meant that shoes, especially ladies' shoes were only worn for a year or two, then discarded. Winkle pickers were lucky to last a season before the toes curled up like jesters' slippers and they had to be thrown out. Though I must admit that I was forever having the metal tips on the heels of my stilettos replaced.

I had never thought of it, but Hugh tells me that Jelly shoes had a very negative effect on the trade of the repairers, and then, of course, there was the trainer. When, exactly did it become acceptable to wear trainers to work? I have no idea, but happen it did. And trainers are never repaired. Consequently the 45,000 repairers countrywide shrunk over a period to around 4,000. Big players, like Goodyear, got out of the trade, but Fussells hung on right to the end of the century and beyond.



Before we get to that, there are lows and high for us to consider. H. J. Fussell's retirement was announced in the local paper in 1945 and the short paragraph also mentioned that he moved to Keynsham. He seems to have had a happy, healthy retirement until his death, at the age of 79. His grandson, Julian, kindly provided copies of the cuttings the family collected over the years, and particularly those reporting H. J.'s death and funeral. These cuttings tell us a great deal about Herbert James Fussell, and even more about the unreliability of the press. Some reports mention four sons and others mention three. The names of these boys also vary, so copies of the cuttings are included here, for you to make your own judgement.

Founder of Weston firm dies

Mr. Herbert James Fussell, founder and former managing director of Fussells Rubber Co., Weston-super-Mare, died today, aged 73.

He had lived at 39, Bath Road, Keynsham, since his retirement in 1945.

Born at Midsomer Norton, Mr. Fussell lived all his life in Somerset. He founded the rubber company at Bath in 1920, but fire destroyed the premises the same year, and it was not until 1923 that he was able to resume, at the Knightstone Mills, Worle, near Weston.

Mr. Fussell, married with four sons, lived in Locking Road East, Weston, for about 30 years. His widow survives him.

Managing director of the firm is now his brother, Mr. E. G. Fussell. One son is the Rev. L. W. Fussell, Rector of Wraxall; another, Ralph, farms at Dyrham; a third lives at Burnham-on-Sea, and the fourth is assistant master at Keynsham county primary school.

WILL OF MR. H. J. FUSSELL

Mr. Herbert James Fussell, of Alston, 39, Bath Road, Keynsham, founder and former managing director of Fussells Rubber Co., Weston-super-Mare, and formerly of Bath, who died on Dec. 2 left £3,385 gross, £2,810 net value.

Probate has been granted to his sons, Mr. James G. Fussell, of the same address, Mr. Ralph L. H. W. Fussell, of Home Farm, Dyrham, near Chippenham; and the Rev. Laurence W. Fussell, of Wraxall Rectory, near Bristol.

RETIREMENT OF MR. H. J. FUSSELL.

It has been announced that Mr. H. J. Fussell, Chairman and Managing Director of Fussell's Rubber Co., Ltd., since its inception 25 years ago, has retired owing to prolonged ill-health.

He is succeeded by Mr. Claude C. Champion, who for the past eight years has been Assistant Manager, and who now becomes Managing Director.

The new chairman is Mr. E. G. Fussell, who is also Sales Manager. Mr. H. J. Fussell leaves Weston-super-Mare after 25 years as a resident, to live in retirement at Keynsham.

FUNERAL OF MR H. J. FUSSELL

The funeral of Mr. Herbert James Fussell, founder and former managing director of Fussell's Rubber Co., Weston-super-Mare, took place at St. John's Parish Church, Keynsham, on Monday.

Mr. Fussell, who was 73, died after a short illness on Friday, at last week.

The service was conducted by the vicar of Keynsham the Rev. C. M. Wedgwood, and the lesson read and the address given by the Rev. Laurence Fussell, rector of Wraxall, Mr. Fussell's son.

Chief mourners were his wife, Mrs. Elsie Fussell; sons, Ralph, Claude, Laurence and Gordon; daughter-in-law, Mrs. Irene Fussell; grandchildren Michael, Andrew, Julian, Mary, Bob and Dick; his brother George and sister-in-law, Ruby; nephews Ron and Arthur, and their wives Annie and Jessie; his brother-in-law, Mr. Percy Baker and Mrs. Baker, and Mr. and Mrs. Ivor Gantle, Miss Jose Gantle and Mr. Roger Yeale.

Other mourners included, the managing director of Fussell's Rubber Co., Mr. C. R. Champion, and representatives of the staff and employees of the company.

Floral tributes were received from all of the aforementioned, and many neighbours and friends.

Cremation followed the service, and the interment took place on Tuesday morning in the family grave at Hinton Charterhouse churchyard, below the east window of the Lady Chapel.

Some of the reports say that Mr. and Mrs. Fussell had four sons: James, Ralph and Lawrence and Gordon. Other articles do not mention Gordon at all, and leave us with the impression that there were only three sons, another names one son as Claude.

Julian was able to clear all this up for me. H. J. Fussell was married twice. He and his first wife had two sons, Ralph and Claude. Sadly the first Mrs. Fussell died when the boys were very small. Later, H. J. married for a second time to Florence, who is mentioned in the newspaper article about the fire, and the couple had two more sons, Laurence and James Gordon. James Gordon was always known as Gordon, so now we can understand the confusion. I understand that Gordon was living with his father at the time of H. J.'s death in 1960. Ralph lived at Home Farm, Dyrham and Laurence [father of Julian and Michael] became rector of Wraxall, near Bristol and lived at the Rectory.

E. G. Fussell, Claude Champion and his sons Roger and then Hugh carried on, of course, and in 1976, Fussells Rubber Co. Ltd. held a special Dinner Dance at the Winter Gardens Pavilion, when they presented gold watches to 12 employees with over 25 years service.



The Mercury produced quite a spread of their own about the occasion, and luckily one of our far sighted members kept their copy. Many of those in the picture are remarkably young, so the company were not only keeping all their experienced staff, but taking on youngsters as well. Those standing at the back are the top table, and include E. G. Fussell, the chairman, and C. B. Champion, M.D., both of whom were given long service awards.

Mayor And Mayoress Present

Nearly 150 employees and guests attended the dinner at which guests included the Mayor and Mayoress (Cllr. and Mrs. E. B. Moore), and later there was entertainment and a dance.

Proposing the health of the firm, the Mayor said: "This must be a unique occasion in the annals of industrial relations at Weston in that we have 12 employees who have served continuously for 25 years with one firm. I should like to congratulate them on this splendid achievement. I should like to congratulate the employers because this unity of partnership between employers and employees working together in co-operation is something that industry as a whole is striving to achieve.

"We read and hear quite a lot about non-co-operation in certain aspects of industrial relations today, because a considerable amount of publicity is given to this when it happens. I think it a pity that the other side—as we have here—is not given equal publicity.

"Your firm is setting an example which could well be followed in industry in this country with a great deal of success."

The text of the article is reproduced below. It reflects the position of Fussells in the fabric of the area.

The article continues over the page.....

deal of success.

Insufficient Scope

The Borough Council had considered the problems of getting further industry to Weston, but the town's basic industry was, of course, the holiday trade, being a seaside resort first and foremost, continued the Mayor.

It was felt, however, there was insufficient scope and variety for young people seeking employment, and Weston would lose the best of its youth unless there was industry here to satisfy the best of these demands. The Council had therefore introduced a long-term scheme to try to introduce industry from the Midlands.

"Then we find in our midst a firm like Fussell's who have developed their industry to its size today. Thank you for the publicity you have given to Weston in your advertising."

The Mayor went on to refer to the firm's contribution to the country's economy through export business—a factor not always recognised to the full.

"It was in 1923 that Mr. Fussell built his factory. It was one of the best things that could have happened to Weston," concluded Cllr. Moore.

....and again....

to Weston, concluded...

No Short Time

Speaking in reply to the toast was Mr. Champion, managing director, who said that not once had the firm to resort to short time.

The health of "The Guests" was proposed by sales manager Mr. R. Harrison, and Mr. J. E. Griffiths, manager of Lloyds Bank Ltd., Weston, replied. Bouquets of flowers were presented by three of the youngest employees.

Reference was made to the history of the firm, its sales representatives in different parts of the country, and the tradition of fielding a keen cricket XI to represent the firm.

Recipients of the presentation watches were Messrs. A. H. Bond (42 years), C. H. Clift (41), W. E. Thompson (38), E. E. Timbury (36), W. S. L. Inder (34), M. J. Venning (29), C. W. Huish, R. C. Jones and W. R. A. Knight (27). The late Mr. E. R. Rogers (44 years) was remembered in a gift made to his youngest daughter.

Entertainment was provided by Ralph and Barbara, featuring the Rainbow Doves, and Roy Smith (baritone). Music for dancing was provided by Les Drake and his orchestra. The toastmaster and M.C. was Mr. Douglas Ashman.

E. G. Fussell, known as Uncle George to his godson, Hugh Champion, must have retired soon after this to his place in Wrington,

Edgar George
Fussell, on the
left, in
retirement



In 1982, on Bonfire Night, Claude Champion arranged a very special celebration. The firm had been in Station Road, Worle for almost 60 years and many of the employees had been with Fussells for their entire working lives. A Dinner Dance and Party was to be held at the Rozel Hotel in honour of a group of people who must, by this time, have felt like an extended family. The list of long serving employees on the menus forms an integral part of the history of Worle.

Tonights function gives the Directors an opportunity to make presentations in honour and recognition of long service to:-

R. Harrison	28 years
N. Howarth	25 years
Margaret E. Nicholls	26 years

The Directors are equally proud of the following who have all completed 25 years or more with the Company.

A. H. Bond	48 years (retired 1969, deceased 1979)
E. R. Rogers	44 years (deceased 1963)
C. H. Clift	41 years (retired 1962, deceased 1967)
W. E. Thompson	41 years (deceased 1966)
E. E. Timbury	42 years (retired 1970)
W. S. L. Inder	38 years (retired 1967)
M. J. Venning	48 years
C. W. Huish	46 years
R. C. Jones	45 years
W. R. A. Knight	46 years
D. R. M. Toogood	42 years
D. W. Jones	43 years
F. E. C. Cattle	40 years
D. W. Stallard	41 years
D. G. Gill	34 years
F. S. Williams	33 years

"Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great"

Emerson

"The cheerfulness of the guest makes the feast"

Menu

Tomato Soup
Grapefruit Cocktail
Pate Rozel

Roast Pork
Roast Chicken
Selection of Vegetables

Black Forest Gateau
Banana Split

Cheese and Biscuits
Coffee

Wines:-
Nierstiener Gutes Domtel
Macon Calvet

Toasts

'HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN'
Proposed by:- Mr. C. B. Champion

'OUR GUESTS'
Proposed by:- Mr. C. B. Champion

Response by:- Mr. Roger J. L. Champion

'FUSSELL'S RUBBER CO. LTD.'
Proposed by:- Mr. R. Harrison

Response by:- Mr. Hugh B. Champion

The toast cards feature several handwritten signatures and notes. Under 'OUR GUESTS', there is a signature that appears to be 'W. H. ...'. Under 'FUSSELL'S RUBBER CO. LTD.', there are multiple signatures including 'Mr. R. Harrison', 'Mr. Hugh B. Champion', and others. There are also some illegible handwritten notes and initials scattered around the signatures.

The menu was a wonderful example of 80s style food: Pate Rozel and Black Forest Gateau. Wow.

It was a wonderful evening and is remembered by many who were there. Some have still kept their invitations. This set of signatures is especially poignant.

Times change and Fussells was forced to change with it. They hung on, in a rapidly declining market, into the 21st Century, and only closed down the premises in Station Road in 2005. By that time the great stalwart, Claude Champion had passed away and his son, Hugh, was in charge. The cottages and the business premises were all demolished and were replaced by Fussells' Court, which provides sheltered housing for the elderly.



Left: The cottages, boarded up and ready to be knocked down.



Above Right: Fussell's Court

Right: The offices and the cottages, taken by Dave Hart. I wonder which brick is in Julian's office?



The business relocated to St. Georges, where it still operates as Champion Processes Ltd., specialising in Electro Plating. The tradition of long term employment lives on. Hugh Champion is still there, and his personal assistant, Anita Pratlett, has worked for the firm for 48 years.

Fussells' place in History

Worle History Society's Fussell evening in October 2010 attracted well over 50 people, and was reported in the Mercury, as shown below. The picture in the article, and those on the following pages, were taken by Peter Johnson, vice-chairman of Worle History.



Fussell's Rubber company night

■ **WORLE HISTORY SOCIETY:** A Fussell's Rubber Co night was held on October 7.

Michael and Julian Fussell, grandsons of the founder, attended as well as Hugh Champion, whose father, Claude, became managing director in the late 1940s.

They brought a wide selection of memorabilia and a host of anecdotes about the firm.

More than 50 people enjoyed an evening of nostalgia and humour, which began with a short presentation on the history of Fussell's.

We were particularly pleased to welcome several retired employees of the firm, and the great grandson of the founders.

Our thanks to everyone who made it such a successful evening.



Worle History Society members listen, enthralled



Memorabilia from the premises in Station Road.



The Author with Michael Fussell



Hugh Champion checks his notes



Michael Fussell, Hugh Champion and Julian Fussell inspect the famous football studs.