

Eli George, his life and service

Anyone of my generation who grew up in Worle will have memories of Eli Follett Henry George. The cottage in the High Street, where he grew up is still standing and this picture, taken in 1907 shows Eli on the right, together with his mother and younger brother, Len.

Of course, Eli George is a wonderful name, and impossible to forget, and from the start Eli was a character. He was blessed with a broad Somerset accent and flapping ears, an endearing combination.

Born in 1894 in Lawrence Road, he went to Worle National School until he was ten years old. Then he worked with his father in the boot and shoe making business in the premises now occupied by the Weston Hospice Charity Shop. Later he worked on several farms, including Woodspring Priory farm, Whitehouse Farm and Nutwell Farm.

Everyone knew Eli and he took part in local activities with gusto. This picture shows him on the bicycle at the Harvest Home celebration. It was the slow bicycle race, and he won. The picture became a postcard and this one was sent to Ontario, Canada in 1912, so Eli was 18 years old. Mr. J. Bailey was the recipient of the card.

Eli is best remembered for his service to St. Martin's church. The National School was a Church of England School and Eli became very attached to the Church. In 1938 he became verger, and never gave up the role. He rang the bells, acted as school caretaker, but best of all, he dug the graves. Children who walked up and down through the churchyard to get to school always stopped to watch the digging process and chat to Eli. Sometimes it was only possible to see his head peeping up from his freshly dug hole. Other days, he wasn't visible at all, and could only be heard, humming tunelessly. His spade was for ever busy



On several occasions his wife, Rose, had to be informed that Eli had fallen into a grave and was unable to climb out. This fact, of course, led to rumours around the village which were quite unfounded.

In 1960, when he was 66 years old, he was working 7 feet down when the sides of the grave gave in and Eli was buried alive under earth and limestone rock. He was dug out by the ambulance men, and taken to hospital, where doctors doubted he would ever recover. But he did, of course, and he spent his remaining time, until he was 91, in and around the church.



Eli knew the names and position of all the graves, so the church never needed to keep records. At that time there were 800 graves. Now there are over 1,600 and the Churchwarden despaired of being able to locate them all when folk came looking for their ancestors. When Eli died in 1985 it became an impossible task.



Eli was buried in the bottom of the churchyard in a grave now numbered J41. In 2013 Worle History Society realised that without Eli many graves would never be identified, so we set to work and 15 of us did the work of Eli, not digging, but recording the graves

I would like to thank Eli, personally, for making such a great job of providing my grandparents, Norman and May Charles, with a lovely resting place with the view of our old family house...and for telling me, and I quote, "God the father, God the Son an' in the 'ole he goes". Thanks for the memories and the ears, Eli.

Raye Green, Worle History Society

www.worlehistorysociety.net

Come and join us at Worle Community Centre on the 1st Thursday of the month at 7.00 p.m., oh, and have a look at our website.

