

## CHARLES JOSEPH WILLS (1848– 1921)

Charles Joseph Wills was born on the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1848 at his maternal grandparents' farm in the village of Radcliffe-on-Trent in Nottinghamshire. He was the third child and second son of Frederick Thomas Lake Wills and his wife Matilda Bowring.

His mother registered Charles' birth on the 20<sup>th</sup> April 1848. On Charles' birth certificate his father's occupation was recorded as 'gentleman'. Frederick grew up in a naval family in Greenwich and was raised as a 'gentleman'; however, Frederick's father was profligate and bankrupt. Frederick had to earn a living, joined the newly formed police force and was assigned to work in Radcliffe-on-Trent.

Charles Joseph Wills was baptised in the local parish church of St Mary on 25<sup>th</sup> April 1848.

The **1851 Census** (30<sup>th</sup> March) records the family living on Ermine Street, Great Ponton. Charles is aged 2 and he has an older brother and sister, Edmund and Matilda. His father is employed as a superintendent of police for the Great Northern Railway (GNR).

As a small child his father's changes of occupation meant that the family moved around quite a lot from Radcliffe to Newark and back again, then to Great Ponton in Lincolnshire and eventually in 1856 to the station master's house at Marton station some half a mile outside the village of Marton in Lincolnshire. All places located within a 30 mile radius of Radcliffe-on-Trent.

When the family settled in Marton, Charles Joseph Wills was eight years old and as well as an older brother and sister; he had a new younger brother, Thomas. Marton is a small village near to the river Trent in a fertile agricultural area. The nearest towns are Gainsborough to the north, Lincoln to the east, with Newark to the south. The family size increased following their move to Marton.

The **1861 Census** (7<sup>th</sup> April) records the family living at Marton Railway Station, Lincolnshire:

• Frederick Thomas Lake Wills	(42)	clerk/station master
• Matilda Wills	(40)	wife
• Matilda Mary Augusta Wills	(15)	daughter
• Charles Joseph Wills	(12)	son
• Thomas Cornelius Wills	(8)	son
• Louis Lake Wills	(5)	son
• Alfred Wills	(3)	son
• Wilfred Wills	(1)	son

Charles Joseph Wills probably left home in the mid-1860s to make his way in life. His parents had a large family and were not at all wealthy, so he was expected to seek employment as soon as he left school. Clearly a self-motivated, intelligent and capable young man, Charles Joseph Wills embarked on his working life as a store keeper on an engineering site; after which he began contract work in a small way at first, progressing to larger contracts in the civil engineering contracting business.

The likelihood is that Charles Joseph Wills worked locally with the Great Northern Railway Company contractors who were extending their routes in Lincolnshire during the mid-1860s. In 1867 GNR opened lines from March to Spalding, from Honington to Lincoln and from Gainsborough to Doncaster.

By 1869 Charles was working in Diggle, Saddleworth for the Thomas Nicholson civil engineering contractors, under the direction of Francis Stevenson, a Chief Engineer for the London and North Western Railway Company. They were working on a second Standedge Tunnel (1868-71) for the railway line between Manchester to Huddersfield, part of the transport network across the Pennines.

While working in Diggle, Charles Joseph Wills met Frances Amelia Shaw, the daughter of a local woollen manufacturer. Charles and Frances were married on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1870 at the parish church in Levenshulme, Lancashire. On the marriage certificate his occupation is recorded as ‘contractor’. At the time of his marriage Charles was twenty-two and Frances was twenty-five. During the first twenty years of their marriage, Charles worked in different parts of the country establishing himself as civil engineering contractor. His wife, Frances Amelia, and their increasing family, moved around with him.

The **1871 Census** (7th April) records Charles (22) and his wife Frances (26) living in Hope, Flintshire in Wales. Charles Joseph Wills was working as a ‘traveller in the spade/shovel trade’. Frances was in the early stages of a pregnancy with her first child. Arthur Shaw Wills, was born in October 1871 at 47 Lombard Street, West Derby, Lancashire. This is where Frances’ parents, James and Mary Shaw had moved to when their business failed. Charles Joseph Wills’ occupation is recorded as ‘cashier’.

Soon afterwards they moved to Milnthorpe (Cumbria) where C J Wills worked as a civil engineering contractor’s manager (agent). The next place of work for C J Wills was Ferryhill in County Durham. The family lived in the nearby town of Shilton, which is where their eldest daughter Mary Matilda Wills was born in July 1873. Her father’s occupation is recorded as ‘contractor’s agent’ (for Lucas and Aird) on her birth certificate. Mary was named after her two grandmothers, Mary Shaw and Matilda Wills.

James Frederick Wills was born in July 1875 at his maternal grandparents’ home in West Derby, Lancashire and his father’s occupation is recorded as ‘contractor’s manager’ (for Lucas and Aird). He was named after his two grandfathers, James Shaw and Frederick Wills.

In 1877 at Glaston, C J Wills was agent for one of four sections of the Midland Railway line from Kettering to Manton which was completed in 1880, working for the civil engineering company Lucas and Aird. C J Wills was sufficiently senior to be awarded the suffix ‘Esquire’ in a newspaper report of a visit by the Bishop of Peterborough to the site.

The line included the Glaston Tunnel, completed in 1878 and is just over a mile long. The Welland Viaduct, also completed in 1878, is the longest masonry viaduct across a valley in Britain and is now a Grade 2 listed building. As was always the case, the labouring work for this project was undertaken by ‘navvies’ (a lot of them were Irish) who lived in camps along the railway line. One of these camps was called ‘Cyprus’ because during the 1870s Cyprus was much in the news with Disraeli and the Suez Canal.

Two more daughters were born while the family were living in Rutland. Frances Amelia Wills was born June 1877 and Ada Beatrice Wills was born December 1878, both of them in Glaston, Rutland in 1879 where their father’s occupation is recorded as ‘railway contractor’s agent’ (manager).

The **1881 Census** (3rd April) records the Wills family living at 1, The Poplars, High Road, West Wickham, Kent. (At the time West Wickham was categorised as a village)

- Charles Joseph Wills (32) head contractor’s agent for Lucas and Aird.
- Frances Amelia Wills (36) wife
- Arthur Shaw Wills (9) son school,
- Mary Matilda Wills (7) daughter school,
- James Frederick Wills (5) son school
- Frances Amelia Wills (3) daughter
- Ada Beatrice Wills (2) daughter,
- Emma Purbrick (16) servant

**Lydia Gertrude Wills** was born on the 18th November 1881 at the family home in West Wickham. She was the sixth child and fourth daughter of Charles Joseph Wills and his wife Frances Amelia. Lydia’s father registered her birth on the 17th December 1881. His occupation at the time was recorded as ‘civil engineer’ and he was still working for Lucas and Aird. Lydia was born at a time when her parents were becoming increasingly prosperous and as a younger child in the family she benefited significantly from this. Lydia had chestnut coloured hair, grey eyes and a fair complexion.

The Wills' youngest child, Dora Jane, was born in March 1883 at Guildford, Surrey and her father's occupation is recorded as 'railway contractor's agent' (for Lucas and Aird).

The **1891 Census** (5th April) records the Wills family living at 100 Liverpool Road, Barton-upon-Irwell, Irlam, Lancashire.

- Charles Joseph Wills (42) head civil engineer
- Frances Amelia Wills (46) wife
- Arthur Shaw Wills (19) son civil engineer
- Mary Matilda Wills (17) daughter dress-making pupil
- Lydia Gertrude Wills (9) daughter at school
- Dora Jane Wills (8) daughter at school
- Mary Shaw (74) mother-in-law widow
- Sarah Marchant (16) general servant

Of the remaining three of their children: James Frederick Wills (15) was at a boys' boarding school in East Hardwick in Yorkshire, while Frances Amelia Wills (13) and Ada Beatrice Wills (12) were at a girls' boarding school at Dukinfield in Cheshire.

The family was living in Lancashire because C J Wills was the agent for Thomas Andrew Walker on Section 7, Warburton to Barton for the Manchester Ship Canal. When T A Walker died in 1889, C J Wills continued, first as agent for Walker's executors, then as an employee of the canal company when they took over the works themselves; finally, when the company let the completion of the works to (Sir) John Jackson, Wills was awarded the contract for the Mill Bank-Pomona Dock section that had not hitherto been started.

*'The Works Committee, for certain reasons, retained a small portion of the work to be done by administration; beyond the completion of the canal was divided amongst the following contractors:*

- No. 1 Mr John Jackson, Old Quay to Randles Sluices*
- No. 2 Mr John Jackson, Randles Sluices to Latchford Locks*
- No. 3 Mr C J Wills, Mill Bank Weir to Barton Locks*
- No. 4 Mr C J Wills, Barton Locks to Pomona Dock'*

Charles Joseph Wills was initiated as a Freemason in Manchester on the 6<sup>th</sup> April 1894. His profession is recorded as 'contractor' and he was a member of the Shakspere Lodge. (*This is not a mis-spelling of Shakespeare!*)

By the early 1890s Charles Joseph Wills had reached the stage in his career when he wanted to establish his own contracting company. His career subsequently involved working sometimes alone, sometimes with John Price, a civil engineer, and Thomas James Reeves, an accountant, and later with his two sons Arthur and James. John Price had been Thomas Andrew Walker's agent on the adjoining section 6 of the Manchester Ship Canal. Thomas James Reeves had been Thomas Andrew Walker's 'confidential agent' and later, one of his executors.

In 1895 Charles Joseph Wills was based in Sale, Lancashire and was listed in a local directory as **Price and Wills**; by 1898 **C J Wills** and **Price and Wills** were both listed at 71 Mosley Street, Manchester, and by 1903 they were also at 28 Victoria Street, Westminster. The three men worked with each other on a project specific basis and shared office premises and another company they created was known as **Price, Wills and Reeves**.

Later Charles Joseph Wills formed a company **C. J. Wills and Sons (Limited)** wherein he was the chairman and his two sons Arthur Shaw Wills and James Frederick Wills were partners. The number in the telephone directory for the London office was Westminster 521. In 1913 with the expanding telephone network, the exchange and number was altered to Gerrard 5622. The company continued to

function with Arthur Shaw Wills and James Frederick Wills at the helm until James' death in 1930. The company went into voluntary liquidation in November 1936.

Two of Charles Joseph Wills' younger brothers worked for him: Alfred Wills as an accountant, until he emigrated to Canada in 1902, and Adderley Wills as a civil engineer. C J Wills also employed a nephew, Frederick Wills, son of his older brother Edmund, as a civil engineer.

Work undertaken by Charles Joseph Wills included 1892-1894, Manchester Ship Canal, Mill Bank – Pomona Dock; 1894-1897 the Tuxford to Lincoln section of the “Lancashire, Derbyshire and East Coast Railway” including the Fladborough Viaduct (the latter equalled half the cost at £65,000); 1900 the Spen Valley Railway and the Sheffield District Railway; in the early 1900s Netherlands, the Amsterdam Waterworks; 1903-1905 Cyprus, Famagusta Harbour, £130,000. Coode, Son & Matthews, Engineers; and in 1909 Egypt, Port Said breakwaters, £250,000;

In the late 1890s C J Wills and Sons Ltd. Undertook work in Spain through a company registered by R W Perks. During 1898-1900 C J Wills and Sons Ltd. Also worked on the Grimsby Fish Dock extension; 1902 Barry Railway, Brecon and Merthyr extension; 1903-1906 Great Western Railway, Castle Cary Langport; the Great Western Railway, widening Yeovil branch; 1906 Great Western Railway, widening Stratford-on-Avon to Bearley; 1908 Great Western Railway, North Warwickshire line, Tyseley-Bearley Junction; 1908-1910 Great Western Railway, Newport Tunnel duplication; 1911-1912 Canada, central Railway, Montreal-Ottawa; and in 1912 Egypt, the River Nile delta local drainage works. In 1905 Charles Joseph Wills was working as a consulting engineer for the Christ's Hospital, Horsham extension to the London Brighton & South Coast Railway.

On the domestic front, in the early 1890s Charles Joseph Wills moved his family to a more permanent home, Bank Hall, a large house set in its own grounds high in the Derbyshire Peaks, near Chapel-en-le-Frith. Bank Hall had its own natural spring water and gas supplies. Bank Hall was built in 1790, but was renovated and given a Victorian façade in the 1880s. The fine ironwork on the gateway to the house is also of this later date. The front of the house looks out towards Kinder Scout and there was a magnificent garden terraced down the hillside with a large number of exotic trees and shrubs.

*Inside the house, the dining room had a series of pre-Raphaelite painted panels and a decorated ceiling. The dining room windows contained stained glass and apparently in each one of the window panels was etched a certain type of tree and if one looked through each of the panels the tree depicted may be seen in the garden. Country Life magazine 1970s.*

Great granddaughter **Giulia Reeves** visited the house in 1990:

*From the road out of Chapel-en-le-Frith at the bottom gates to the main iron gates to the side of the house, the drive is exactly a mile long and it climbs very steeply with a sheer drop to one side. There are two other drives – the back drive and a drive to Ridge Hall, which merges with the drive to Bank Hall at the bottom lodge. Apparently the drives were made to connect when the station was built in order that the occupiers of Bank Hall and Ridge Hall could use the station without having to go all the way to Chapel and up again.*

The Wills family lived at Bank Hall very happily and Lydia and Milo (Frances Amelia) often reminisced affectionately about their lives here. The daughters of the family often took a coach (or sledge during snowy weather) down to the village and sometimes to the nearby town of Buxton. The coachman used to say that, “Miss Milo rides too fast and drives too fast”.

Lydia was always close to her sister Dora who was just a couple of years younger. In their teens they were sent to boarding school in Llandudno. Lydia sometimes talked about that time and said that every day at lunchtime the girls were only allowed to converse in French.

Family members regularly took the train to Euston Station, London and always stayed at the Russell Hotel. Friends and family frequently stayed at Bank Hall and were always made welcome. The evidence suggests that Charles Joseph Wills (affectionately known as C.J. within the family) was a family man with

a strong sense of responsibility and duty of care towards his kith and kin. He enjoyed having his family around him and he also maintained close contact with his parents, brothers and sisters. Additionally, a number of family members were employed in his companies.

In October 1894 Charles was a witness at the marriage in Lincoln of his younger sister Edith Elvira Wills to Robert Blow. Their mother, Matilda Wills, had died in 1891. Their father Frederick, in his mid-seventies, had moved to Lincoln to live with his elder daughter Matilda and daughter-in-law Flora. He was dying of cancer. Although by now a wealthy man, Charles Joseph Wills did not lose touch with his roots, supporting his family whenever he could financially. It is more than likely that he paid for the handsome marble plinth with a cross that marks the grave of his mother and younger brother Louis in the churchyard at Marton, as well as the splendid gravestone of his father and sister Matilda in St Swithin's churchyard in Lincoln.

The first of the Wills offspring to marry was Mary Matilda who married an Australian doctor, George William Beaumont Featherstone on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1897. Mary married from Bank Hall at the parish church of St Thomas á Becket in Chapel-en-le-Frith. The eldest daughter of the family, Mary was unconventional, outgoing, forthright and energetic, with a great sense of humour and wanderlust; and in her own way she was a feminist.

The following year Arthur Shaw Wills married Hilda Austwick at Prestwich, Lancashire on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1898. Hilda's older brother, Rev William Austwick, would become a close family friend. Both Arthur and Mary had met their respective spouses while living in Irlam, Lancashire.

Frances Amelia Wills (Milo/Millie) married Alfred John Marsh (Artie), an architect, on the 19<sup>th</sup> July 1899. Milo also married from Bank Hall in the parish church in Chapel-en-le-Frith. On the previous March 15<sup>th</sup> 1899, Frances Wills had written to her daughter Milo's fiancé Artie to commiserate about his illness:

*My dear Artie,*

*We are all so sorry to hear you have influenza and hope you will have it very slightly. I hope you will not get up too soon as a little patience at first very often shortens the time, and gives a much better chance of recovery. I need not tell you how upset Millie is and I hope you will be able to let us know frequently how you are progressing. Whatever you do keep in bed as long as you possibly can, have plenty of Bovril too and keep nice and warm. We shall be very anxious until we hear from you again.*

*Yours affectionately,  
F A Wills*

While Milo and Artie were on their honeymoon in Scotland, Milo's mother Frances Wills wrote to them at the Tarbet Hotel in Loch Lomond:

*My dear Millie and Artie,*

*I thank you very much for your kind letters for which we were anxiously looking for and we are pleased to hear that you are both quite well. I am so happy we are favoured with such good weather, it has continued fine until yesterday. Now you want to know who stayed. Mary and Frank went away the next day, also Arthur, Frank Cronin and Edgar (Mrs Reeves and Mrs Meares on Friday, and Jimmie). Your father took with him to Heysham, Harry Featherstone, Harry Price and Mr Price and they returned last night for dinner, but H F went on to Hay. The rest are staying until tomorrow (Monday). Mr and Mrs Price, Harry, Bessie Morley, Olive, May and Mollie are going towards the weekend and May Seward is going on Tuesday. As you will imagine we are a merry party. Dora is going to visit South Bank a little later. We are going to Scotland and then to Holland a little later.*

*Mrs Price and myself quite beat Mr Price and Mrs Reeves at croquet and we had a good game of billiards, but I shall have to practice much before I excel at that, so when you and Artie come over*

*in the winter I shall expect Artie and Jimmie to teach me properly. I think I must say the dinner went off very well indeed and everyone seemed in the best of spirits. I must say the table looked lovely and the waiting and everything else up to the mark. Of course your health was drunk. The man came the next day and packed everything and took them away. May and Mollie Price are going to have a few riding lessons in Buxton this week and I am going to Loue's with May tomorrow.*

*I will now conclude hoping you will let us know how you are getting on. Ada is not very well with a cold, but I think I have kept up splendidly. I was exceedingly tired for a few days and my liver out of order a little, but I am well now. I shall miss you very much when all is quiet and settled. It will be better for me to go away, but I must go to Haslemere with Florrie soon. What day were you thinking of returning? With much love to you both and many thanks for Artie's kind letter to your Papa and myself. I sincerely hope you will always be very happy.*

*Your loving mother,  
F A Wills*

At the beginning of August Frances Wills wrote to her daughter again at the Balmoral Hotel, Edinburgh.

*My dear Millie,*

*I did intend to catch this post but could not, as we were late back from making calls. Ada and myself have called upon the Hultons and they seem particularly nice, both Mr and Mrs. Their cottage is very nice, indeed exquisitely furnished. We then went on to Ford Hall and took tea in the garden with Mrs Bagshaw and also Mrs Murray, they were very nice indeed.*

*Molly and May are still here. Molly and Dora leave for Wimbledon on Tuesday next. May has been quite ill with a severe bilious attack and Dr Greenburgh is attending her. She is however improving, but still very weak and lying about. She has not begun with solid food, as soon as she can take a tonic she will be very soon well again.*

*Ada is giving a tennis party on Saturday, hence the reason for Mollie and Dora staying. I believe they will go from South Bank today. I must not forget to tell you that Mrs Bagshaw congratulated me on your marriage. We are having very hot weather lately. Lydia, myself and your Papa are going to Scotland a week tomorrow (Thursday) and then very likely we shall take Ada to Holland. Everyone who has written to send cards have expressed themselves as being delighted with the wedding and enjoying themselves splendidly.*

*I have at last got a kitchen maid from Dora Holes through Mrs Oxley. Just when I had got her the cook that is coming had got one daughter who has been home for the weekend and knew of one that would come, so it never rains but it pours. Rosie has got two good servants for May. Lydia and myself are having a coat/skirt made at H.S.I.G. and I intend to come and see you quite a swell when I do come.*

*Mr and Mrs Boycott came up yesterday and she sent her love to you and also Mrs Greenburgh. I shall miss you very much and I seem to feel as if you had gone on a visit and would soon return. Perhaps they may have told you that Bruce Kirk is engaged to young Ashton of Bowden Hall.*

*I must now conclude hoping you are still enjoying yourselves. You will both be settled in your new home by the time we get back from Scotland. All join me in love to you both.*

*Your loving mother,  
F A Wills*

The **1901 Census** (31st March) records the household at Bank Hall, Chapel-en-le Frith, Derbyshire:

- Charles Joseph Wills (52) civil engineering contractor of public works

- Frances Amelia Wills (56) wife
- Lydia Gertrude Wills (19) daughter
- Dora Jane Wills (17) daughter
- Lily Doughty (24) parlour maid,
- Beatrice Bowles (23) cook
- Elizabeth Buckingham (17) kitchen maid

The *Buxton Advertiser* of Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May 1901 carried a report of the seventh annual show of the Whaley Bridge Agricultural Society. The Judges awarded the palm to Mr C J Wills of Bank Hall, Chapel-en-le-Frith, for his chestnut filly. Additionally, he won second prize in the category of brood mare, in foal or with foal at foot.

The third daughter to marry from Bank Hall was Ada Beatrice Wills who married Charles Lewis Saunders, a stock-broker, on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1901. Their marriage was announced in the *Buxton Advertiser*, Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> July 1901:

On the 17<sup>th</sup> Inst., at St Thomas à Becket's Church, Chapel-en-le-Frith, by Rev Dr Given, assisted by the Rev W H Austwick and the Rev J O Houghton, Charles Lewis Saunders, fourth son of Mr William Saunders of Sydenham, to Ada Beatrice, third daughter of Mr C J Wills, of Bank Hall, Chapel-en-le-Frith.

The *Sheffield Independent* carried a detailed description of the wedding on Friday 19<sup>th</sup> July 1901:

#### **MARRIAGE OF MISS WILLS OF CHAPEL-EN-LE-FRITH**

*Many of the elite of Chapel-en-le-Frith were present on Wednesday afternoon at the Parish Church to witness the wedding of Miss Ada Wills, third daughter of Mr Charles J Wills of Bank Hall, to Mr Charles L Saunders, of Sydenham. The bride, who was given away by her father, was dressed in ivory Duchesse satin, trimmed with accordion pleated chiffon, having transparent yoke and sleeves. Her train was draped from the left shoulder with Duchesse satin lined with chiffon, and she wore a tulle veil over a wreath of orange blossom. The bride's train was borne by Miss Norah Given, of Nottingham, who wore a white Liberty silk dress, with hat to match. Her gold bangle and pearl necklace were gifts of the bridegroom. The bridesmaids were Miss Lydia Wills, Miss Dora Wills, Miss Wilson, and Miss Sewell, who were attired in silk muslin trimmed with lace and wore large picture hats. Their pearl brooches were the bridegroom's gift. Captain Saunders DSO, Royal Marine Light Infantry, was best man. The service was choral. Dr Given, Nottingham, late vicar of Chapel-en-le-Frith officiated, and was assisted by the Rev W H Austwick and the Rev J O Houghton. There was a reception at Bank Hall, and afterwards the newly married pair left for their honeymoon in Scotland.*

In 1901 James Frederick Wills (Jimmie) was on holiday in Nice in the south of France, visiting the flower festival held there, when he met a young, carefully chaperoned, Italian woman who was staying at the same hotel.

The following year, on the 24<sup>th</sup> April 1902, Jimmie (26) married Irene Amalia Maria Conversini (23), in Florence. Although James was married in Florence, the marriage banns were read three months before the wedding, at the parish church at Chapel-en-le-Frith. Irene was the daughter of Segna Conversini and Ottavia Festinon, residents of Serravalle Pistoiese, Italy.

According to Jimmie and Irene's granddaughter, Frances Scott-Ram, Irene was petite, only 4' 11", while Jimmie was a big, tall man. Frances Scott-Ram said that Jimmie loved music, particularly opera. He had a lovely singing voice and his daughter Frances would accompany him on the piano. Frances Scott-Ram wrote: "*We are quite a musical family*" and she still has the music that her mother played when she was a child.

In 1903/4 Charles Joseph Wills took his youngest daughters, Lydia and Dora, on an extended trip to the Mediterranean to visit some of the projects his companies were involved with. They visited Egypt, Port Said, Constantinople (Istanbul) and Cyprus where C J Wills and Sons were building the harbour at Famagusta (1903-1905). Later, in 1909 the company worked on the Port Said breakwaters. This was a memorable trip for the young women and Lydia often referred to it with enormous pleasure when she

reminisced with her family in later years. C J Wills was accompanied by his youngest daughters on this trip and his wife remained at home. It is likely that Frances Wills' health was beginning to fail and she was not well enough to travel.

Having been engaged once and then broken it off, Lydia later became engaged to Frank John Reeves, the son of one of her father's business associates, Thomas James Reeves. Additionally, Frank was working in the firm Messrs Price and Reeves as a civil engineering contractor himself.

On the 25th July 1905 Lydia and Frank married at St Peter's Church, Cranley Gardens, South Kensington. Lydia's older sisters had all married from Bank Hall, but in 1905 her mother's health was deteriorating and her parents were planning a move to Surrey, so it was decided that Lydia and Frank's wedding would take place in London where her fiancé's family were based, his parents living in South Kensington. However, banns were read in the local parish church at Chapel-en-le-Frith on the 2nd, 9th and 16th of July 1905. St Peter's was the church where Frank's two older sisters had married some years previously. At the time of their marriage Frank was thirty and Lydia was twenty-four.

Lydia wore a beautiful dress of cream silk and lace, with a veil. Lydia's younger sister Dora was a witness at the marriage which was announced in *The Times*. Lydia's going-away outfit was black silk trimmed with white; black was always her preferred colour for formal wear. Frank and Lydia spent their honeymoon motoring round France and Spain. Their first home was Elgin Lodge in Weybridge.

Charles Joseph Wills and his wife decided to move to Surrey. Four of their children lived in the area: James at Crockham Hill, Milo at Bletchingly, Ada at Guildford and Lydia at Weybridge. Dora Wills lived in London, so the proximity of their family and the prospect of a gentler climate may have been important considerations for Charles and Frances Wills in moving south.

Land was purchased by Charles Joseph Wills on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1906 and the new house was completed by the end of the year. Westcott House was built to an impressive specification in the village of Westcott, just outside Dorking. The house was set in 15 acres of parkland with a lake. Charles Joseph Wills also acquired a herd of pedigree cows of which he was very proud. Westcott House was later described as follows (when the property was put up for sale in 1923):

*It is an attractive residence grandly situated on high ground commanding really fine views and perfectly equipped with 4 Reception Rooms, Billiard Room, 12 Bed and Dressing Rooms and 3 Baths. It had an Entrance Lodge, Garages, Stabling, two Cottages, a Farmery and extensive grounds which alone would entitle this property to a high place amongst the most attractive of the lesser residential estates in the district.*

*Every advantage has been taken of the natural features in which the situation abounds, and the resource with which some of these have been developed, and the not less skilful restraint which has left others untouched in order to create effective contrasts, afford a fine example of 'the art and craft of garden making'. Here in the various seasons of the year are spacious lawns with spreading trees and cool shade; borders of roses and herbaceous flowers; grassy slopes adorned with daffodils; bold effects of rock and wall gardening; and orchards where a wealth of blossom foretells an abundance of fruit. In a secluded corner a pretty little thatched garden house overlooks an excellent Croquet Lawn, and nearby is another Lawn for Tennis.*

*Down in the meadows the little Pipp Brook, after flowing through the lake, goes sprawling noisily over waterfalls of rocks to thread its way amongst the alders and willows that mark the boundary of the estate. The lake itself has a special charm at evening time. The very stillness of the water; the quiet reeds that fringe its borders; the silent trees reflected in its surface; the noiseless movement of the water fowl, all encourage a sense of restfulness not always to be found even amidst the beauties of a Surrey landscape.*

Frances Amelia Wills died of 'mitral disease heart failure' on the 1<sup>st</sup> December 1907, just a few days short of her sixty-third birthday. Frances died at her home Westcott House and her death ended a marriage of 47 years. Milo and Artie were with her when she died and Artie registered her death.



As was the custom in some traditional Anglican funerals in the nineteenth century, only men attended Frances Amelia Wills' funeral took place on the 5th December 1907 at Holy Trinity church, Westcott.

The *Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*, Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> December, 1907.

**WESTCOTT**  
**DEATH OF MRS WILLS**  
**FUNERAL AT WESTCOTT**

*We regret to record the death of Mrs Wills, wife of Mr C J Wills at her residence, Westcott House, on Sunday morning. The deceased lady, who was 63 years of age, had resided in Westcott for nearly two years and had been an invalid for some time past.*

*The funeral took place at Westcott on Thursday afternoon, when many signs of respect were in evidence, the blinds being drawn at almost all the business and private houses en route to the church. The service was conducted by the Vicar (the Rev A D Woolley), and the Rev B S Phillips (curate parish church, Dorking). The mourners were: Mr C J Wills (husband), Mr A S Wills, Mr J F Wills, Dr Featherstone, Mr Saunders, Mr Marsh, Mr Reeves, Mr Sewell, Mr Price, Mr Pearsall, Mr Meares, Mr Hallowday, Dr H Featherstone, Dr Cornish, Dr Blakeney, and Mr Thomas. The indoor and outdoor staff were also present at the graveside. The coffin, which was made of polished oak with brass fittings, bore the inscription: "Frances Amelia Wills, died Dec. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1907, aged 63," and was lowered into the grave lined with white chrysanthemums and evergreens. On the coffin rested a beautiful cross and two wreaths from the bereaved husband, Miss Wills (daughter), and other members of the family.*

*Other floral tributes of a beautiful description were sent by, "Artie and Millie", "Hilda and Arthur", "Lydia and Frank", Mr Edward Gilbert, "Ada and Charlie", "Guy", "Charlie, Lilies and Arthur", "George and Mary", Mr and Mr T J Reeves (Kensington Court, W.), Mr J A Reeves, "Kathleen and Dallas", Mr and Mrs Hallowday, Mr J Elgee Gunning, Mr and Mrs D Connery and family (Wimbledon), Mr and Mrs E A Harvey (Dorking), "Mr T T Davies, Mary and Gertrude", the Misses Featherstone (Aberdovey, North Wales), Mr and Mrs W R Hesketh (Hale), Mr and Mrs Leonard Avery (Mayfair, W.), Mr and Mrs J B Ball (Chorleywood, Bucks.), Mr and Mrs Cory Wright, Dr and Mrs H E Featherstone (Walton-on-the-Hill), Dr and Mrs Capen, Mr and Mrs Meares (Scarborough), Mr and Mrs J Price (Waterloo-place, S.W.), Dr and Mrs M Cornish (Dorking), Mr and Mrs Frank Reeves, the Nurse (Fonthill Cottage), the inside and outside servants at Westcott House, the gardeners at Westcott House, the staff at London and Birmingham, Messrs Handstoun and Richardson, "Ludlow and family", the staff at Birmingham Dock contract, etc. The funeral arrangements were efficiently carried out by Messrs F Davey and Co., Dorking.*

Frances was buried in the graveyard of local parish church of Holy Trinity in Westcott in what would become the family grave. The inscription on her gravestone is:

In loving memory of **Frances Amelia.**

The beloved wife of **Charles Joseph Wills** of Westcott House who departed this life Dec 1<sup>st</sup> 1907  
+ Till He Come +

In 1910 a passenger list records: Charles Joseph Wills, age 62, widower, resident of Dorking, England, sailed from Southampton on board the 'Majestic', and arrived 11<sup>th</sup> August 1910 at Ellis Island, New York, in transit to Montreal, Canada. His company was working on the Central Railway on the line between Montreal and Ottawa. Charles also visited his younger brother Alfred Wills who had emigrated to Canada in 1902 with his wife's maid who was pregnant with his child. Charles sent a postcard to his daughter Dora who was staying at Westcott House at the time. The ship on the postcard is the USS Adirondack which usually sailed on the Hudson River between New York City and Albany, New York. It is only a three hour drive from Albany, New York to Montreal, Quebec, so Charles sailed from New York on the Adirondack, and then took the train to Montreal. Dora was the only one of the Wills siblings who never

married, but according to Lydia, there was someone she was engaged to, but he was killed during the First World War (1914-1918).

On the date of the **1911 Census**, Charles Joseph Wills was abroad on a business trip to India. The three female servants who 'lived-in' completed the census form and recorded that there were 19 rooms in Westcott House. In the meantime, while he was in India, Charles Joseph Wills kept in close touch with his family. From Bombay, 11<sup>th</sup> March 1911, he wrote to his daughter Frances Amelia Marsh (Milo) who was on holiday in Switzerland:

*My Dear Millie,*

*Yours of the 18<sup>th</sup> just to hand, the mail was a day later so we are feeling the after effects of that long walk aren't we?*

*Why do you not continue to Lake Como while Arty digs the garden?*

*I am very well, knee quite right after all it was water on the knee.*

*You never once told me Col Stuart was at Territet. You should have spoken to them but then I know you take after your father.*

*I must close I have very little time and I must write to Dora.*

*The Featherstones are leaving Aldershot and Waltham-on-the-Hill.*

*With love to you all*

*Your afft. Father*

*CJ Wills*

Charles Joseph Wills (63) had been a widower for four years when he married for a second time, on the same date and month as his first marriage, 12<sup>th</sup> October 1911, in the parish church of St Nicholas, Hereford. He married a close friend of his eldest daughter Mary, Gertrude Sarah Davies, and there was a twenty-year age difference. Gertrude Sarah Davies was the younger daughter of Thomas Theophilus Davies of Broomy Hill, Hereford. Charles Joseph Wills' daughter, Frances Amelia Marsh (Milo), and his son-in-law Artie were the two witnesses at the marriage and the only members of his family to attend the wedding or send good wishes or a gift.

The *Leatherhead and Dorking Advertiser* included an announcement of the marriage in its edition on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> October 1911.

A report of the wedding was published by the *Hereford Times* on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October.

#### **MARRIAGE OF MISS GERTRUDE DAVIES**

*The marriage took place quietly on Thursday afternoon at St Nicholas Church, Hereford, between Mr Charles J Wills of Westcott House, Dorking, Surrey, formerly of Bank Hall, Chapel-en-le-Frith, Derbyshire, and Miss Gertrude Davies, of Broomy Hill, formerly of Greyfriar's House, Hereford. Only the immediate relatives of the parties were present.*

*The bride wore a charming gown of soft grey satin and brocade, and a grey hat with ostrich plumes, and carried a beautiful bouquet of flowers. She was given away by her brother, Dr Richard Davies, of Cheltenham, and attended by her sister, who was attired in blue ninon and satin with picture hat, and carried a bouquet of pale pink malmaisons, and wore a pearl and turquoise bracelet, the gift of the bridegroom. Mr A J Marsh acted as best man.*

*The officiating clergymen were the Rev W De Kilpeck, MA, rector of Corfe Castle, Dorset, the Rev A B Wynne Wilson, rector of the parish, and the Rev Gilbert Davies, of Jude's, Southwark (brother of the bride).*

*After the ceremony the wedding party returned to Gwynfa, Broomy Hill, the residence of Mr James Davies (uncle of the bride), where a family reception was held.*

*The happy couple left by the afternoon train en route for Cornwall.*

*The following is a list of presents for the bride:*

*Bridegroom to bride, dressing case, travelling trunk and rug; bride to bridegroom, gold cigar holder and cigar box.*

*Bride's father, cheque; Rev and Mrs Gilbert Davies, handbag; Mr Hubert Davies, cheque; Dr and Mrs Richard Davies (Cheltenham), gold and pearl pendant; Mr and Mrs Ernest Davies, silver mounted umbrella; Miss Davies, silver bag and card case; Mr James Davies, cheque; Rev J R Davies (cousin), book, "Pleasures of Life"; Bride's aunt (late Miss George), cornelian and pearl pendant; Mr Price, Honiton lace handkerchief; Mr and Mrs A J Marsh, silver fruit centre piece.*

*The servants at Woodview, pair of silver candlesticks; the servants of Gwynfa, tortoiseshell and silver hat pins. The Rev and Mrs De Kilpeck (Corfe Castle), silver candlestick; The Rev and Mrs A B Wynne Wilson, prayer book; Mr and Mrs T J Reeves (Kensington), salad bowl; Mr and Mrs P N Meares (Newport), silver tray; Dr and Mrs Herbert Jones, cut glass and silver scent bottle; Dr and Mrs Joshua (Malvern), silver sugar sifter; Dr Garratt (Cheltenham), trinket box; Miss Nellie Goode and Mr Fred Cuddon, silver sauce bowl; Mr and Mrs A B Walmsley, book "Country Homes of England"; Mr and Mrs Horace Magee, Irish embroidered sofa cushion; Miss Miller (Earl's Court), Venetian necklace; Miss House (Dawlish), gold filigree brooch; Miss Chave, silver thermos jug; Miss Maddison, silver milk goblet; Mr H Featherstone-Salt, hand-painted d'oyles and table centre; Miss Frances George, embroidered handkerchiefs; Mrs T W Williams, lace collar (hand made); Miss Watts, birthday text book; Miss Wilks, leather purse; Miss Harris, Indian embroidered blouse; Miss Mary Cooke, silver tortoiseshell tea caddy; Miss Addison, silver salts; Mr Lewis (Llandaff), work case; Mr and Mrs Arthur Holmes, Liberty tea cosy; Miss S Thomas, silver salts; Mrs G Heins and Mrs Arnott, silver jam spoons; Mr Phillips, embroidered handkerchiefs; Mrs W Howells, flower vases; Miss Phillips, embroidered linen bag; Miss Church, hand-painted gauze centre; Miss Edith Walmesley, devotional book; Miss Ada Williams, enamelled buttons; Miss Matthews, Chinese spoons; Miss Readshaw, hand-painted theatre bag; etc.etc.etc.*

In the spring of 1912 Charles Joseph Wills and his new bride set sail on an extended honeymoon travelling round the world and to visit relatives in Hawaii. Their names were on the passenger list sailing from Yokohama, Japan 18<sup>th</sup> May 1912 of the 'SS Chiyo Maru' and arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii 25<sup>th</sup> May 1912. They had sixteen pieces of luggage with them. There were several Wills cousins living in Hawaii, as well as Charles' younger brother Thomas Cornelius Wills and his family.

Travel documentation records a physical description of Charles Joseph Wills: 6' 2" in height, fair hair and blue eyes.

The couple then sailed from Honolulu 25<sup>th</sup> June 1912 on the 'SS Tenyo Maru' and arrived in San Francisco, California, USA 1<sup>st</sup> July 1912. Mr and Mrs C J Wills set sail from New York on the SS Baltic, travelling First Class, and arrived at Liverpool 10<sup>th</sup> August 1912. The SS Baltic was a ship of the White Star line which also had among its list the RMS Titanic which had sunk in the Atlantic 15<sup>th</sup> April 1912.

**The Times** carried a report 30<sup>th</sup> October 1912:

*Harbour Work in Italy – A large contract has been obtained from the Italian government by Messrs. C J Wills and Sons for dredging work at various harbours along the coast of the Ionian and Adriatic seas. These harbours extend from Cape D'Armi to Ancona, and include the ports of Cotrone, Tarante, Gallipoli, Otranto, Brindisi, Monopoli, Mola Di Bari, Bari, Molfetta, Trani, Barletta, Manfredonia, Ortona Pesera, Ancona and several other places of minor importance. It is expected that the work, which has been started recently, will take five years to complete.*

In 1914 the new Bombay Docks opened, built by C J Wills and Sons. This event was reported in the **Financial Times** 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1914:

*Bombay 21<sup>st</sup> March 1914*

*The Viceroy to-day opened the new docks, of which the King, as Prince of Wales, laid the foundation stone on 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1905.*

*The docks contain seventeen berths capable of accommodating the largest steamers in the Eastern trade, and include the Hughes dry dock, which is 1,000 ft long, and which, according to the wishes of the Admiralty, has been designed to take the largest battleship afloat, and cost four millions sterling. Provision has been made for a berth from which passengers from the mail steamers can entrain immediately. The sheds, wharves and entrances are lighted by electricity. The reclamation of an area of 525 acres is now proceeding, and is expected to cost two and a-half millions sterling to complete. This will provide additional accommodation for the increasing trade of the port. It is proposed to have a cotton green to cover 166 acres, with 182 acres available for further extension, as against the present 50 acres. The present system of carting cotton bales through the main thoroughfares of the city will thereby be abolished.*

*At the opening ceremony the Viceroy read the following message of congratulation from the King Emperor: "The new docks you are opening are constructed on such a scale as to constitute Bombay one of the finest ports in the East." A message was also read from Queen Alexandra, after whom the docks are named. - Reuter*

During the First World War (1914-1918) C J Wills and Sons undertook a number of government contracts, including River Humber and Firth of Forth anti-submarine defences; oil fuel depots at Immingham, Hull, Ardrossan, Middlesborough, Grangemouth and Castle Carey; River Tees and Blackwater, naval bases; Killingholme, slipways and docks. Additionally, River Humber and Marsden, County Durham deepwater foundations for fortification works. One such project at the time was the Spurnhead Military Railway built in 1915 by C J Wills and Sons. The line was 4 miles long and connected Kinsea with Spurn. It was built to support the construction, supply and maintenance of the wartime fortifications along the mouth of the Humber Estuary in East Yorkshire. In 1914 500 troops were stationed there and there was also a Battery built to defend the posts along the Humber Estuary.

Just after the war the company's work included the refurbishment of Newhaven Docks (Sussex).

***The Times*** carried a report 19<sup>th</sup> May 1920:

*A new London Town – Five Million Pounds for the Dagenham Scheme – At a meeting of the London County Council yesterday, Mr J W Gilbert presiding, the estimate of expenditure on capital account of 5,000,000 pounds, submitted by the finance committee in respect of the partial development of the Dagenham site, was approved, and it was agreed that the work of construction involved should, subject to the approval of the Minister of Health, be entrusted to Messrs. C J Wills and Sons (Limited), of Victoria Street, as master contractors for the whole undertaking. The housing committees report on the matter stated that this firm asked for a fee of 450,000 pounds, or 1.5 per cent, on an actual cost of 30,000,000 pounds. The estimate of 50,000,000 pounds would, it was thought, cover the cost of such work as could be undertaken for the first 12 months or so.*

C J Wills and Sons won the contract for what would be one of their final major public works projects. Built between 1921 and 1935, London County Council agreed the most ambitious public housing programme of the era, namely, a large housing estate in Dagenham. The estate, called Becontree, covered 4 square miles and was opened by George V when it was completed in 1935. This project transformed a 3,000-acre swath of market gardens in Essex into a model-cottage garden estate of 26,000 homes for 100,000 people, mainly re-housed from the East End of London slums and able to enjoy running hot water and indoor toilets for the first time. "Heaven with the gates off", was how one resident described it.

At its peak, the site employed 6,000 workmen and houses were completed at the rate of 97 per week. The area had a very limited transport network. Experience in trench warfare in Belgium and France during the First World War had shown that temporary railway systems were efficient in bringing and removing materials in difficult terrain. C J Wills and Sons established a temporary railway, connecting with existing goods sidings at Goodmayes on the Great Eastern Railway main line. Running east to near

Chadwell Heath, it then turned broadly south through the future estate to a jetty on the River Thames, a distance of 3 miles. The company acquired a fleet of thirteen industrial locomotives for the work, as well as a number of wagons for the internal conveyance of materials from two gravel pits and from the jetty. It was estimated that over 4 million tons of materials were delivered to the site.

In the 1960s the architectural historian Nikolaus Pevsner wrote in his **Buildings of England guidebook: A tour of Brecontree is demanding even for the enthusiast**. None the less, Brecontree was regarded as the 'flagship' of the London County Council's 'cottage estate' house building programme and in 2021 it remains the largest public housing development in the world.

In May 1921 Charles Joseph Wills suffered his first stroke. This left him severely incapacitated and necessitated the care of two nurses, both of whom moved into Westcott House to look after him. It was his wife Gertrude who completed the 1921 Census form.

The **1921 Census** (19th June) records the Wills household at Westcott House, Westcott, Dorking, Surrey:

- Charles Joseph Wills (73) Railway Contractor, 28 Victoria Street, Westminster
- Gertrude Sarah Wills (53) wife
- Eliza Salisbury (43) nurse
- Charles Joseph Hilson (41) butler
- Emma Frances Hilson (45) housemaid
- Ann Irene Hutchings (15) kitchen maid
- William George Padbury (38) male sick nurse

Charles Joseph Wills died of a stroke on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1921. His daughter Milo and son-in-law Artie were staying at Westcott at the time, having been summoned from Grenoble where they were staying in the French Alps. His elder son, Arthur Shaw Wills, who was then on holiday with his large family at 126 Kings Road, Brighton, registered the death.

After a funeral at Holy Trinity church, Charles Joseph Wills was buried alongside his first wife Frances Amelia Wills in the churchyard at Westcott in accordance with his wishes. The inscription on his gravestone is:

Also of **Charles Joseph Wills** who passed away July 22<sup>nd</sup> 1921 aged 73 years  
+ Requiescat in Pace +

That Charles Joseph Wills was a well-respected figure in the village of Westcott was clear from the report on his death and funeral included in the ***Dorking and Leatherhead Advertiser*** 30<sup>th</sup> July 1921:

### **A WESTCOTT LOSS**

*We regret to record the death of Mr Charles Joseph Wills, of Westcott House, at the age of 73 years.*

*Mr Wills' name, however, was better known in engineering circles, where his reputation as a public works contractor was world-wide. Mr Wills was chairman of the firm C.J. Wills and Sons, Ltd. of Victoria-street, Westminster, and managing partner of Messrs. Price, Wills and Reeves, of the same address. In the course of a busy and strenuous life, Mr Wills undertook the construction of many railways and docks at home and abroad. The foundations of his successful life's work were laid in the construction of a large section of the Manchester Ship Canal. Prominent amongst the public works carried out by him and by his firm, are the Fraserborough Harbour, the Barry Docks, Heysham Harbour and Immingham Docks. Mr Wills blazed a trail to India and made possible many of the conveniences and aids to speed enjoyed by the travellers of today. The dredging of the Italian harbours in the Adriatic, the improvements of the harbours of Cyprus and of Alexandria, the construction of the new breakwaters, and the remodelling of the harbours of Port Said, of Suez, and of Aden, and finally the construction of new docks in Bombay, crowned years of difficult work and effort. Many railways at home and abroad testify to Mr Wills' energy and skill.*

*During the war Mr Wills placed his experience and organisation at the disposal of the Government, and he was called on to carry out and in many cases assist in the design of important schemes of fortifications, submarine defences, and the provision of oil fuelling facilities for the Navy. The unsparing energy he devoted throughout the war to this work contributed in no small degree to the breakdown in health which resulted in his death on Friday in last week at his Westcott home.*

### **THE FUNERAL**

*Mr C.J.Wills was laid to rest on Wednesday afternoon, in the churchyard of Holy Trinity Church, Westcott. The service which was fully choral was conducted in the church by the Vicar, The Rev.F.H. Satzmann, M.A., and at the graveside by the Rev.W.H.Austwick, M.A., of St Augustine's Manchester. The large gathering at the church of relatives and friends and business associates, bore witness to the affectionate esteem in which he was held. The family and other mourners included Mrs C J Wills (widow), Mr and Mrs A S Wills and family, Mr J F Wills, Dr and Mrs Featherstone and son, Mr and Mrs A J Marsh, Mr and Mrs C L Saunders and family, Mr and Mrs Frank Reeves, Miss D Wills (daughter), Mr Wilfred Wills (brother), Mr Hubert Davies, the Rev W H Austwick, M.A., Mr D Sewell, Mr P N Meares, Mr D B Sharples, Mr Robert Holloday, Mr P G Pollard, Mr E P Wooldridge, Mr L Hopkins, Mr R Smart, Mr P Loft, Mr C Richardson, Mr R Fisher, Mr A Sheard, Mr G Pearsall, Mr J Kershaw, Mr Harry Price, Mr John Reeves, Mr Vernon Price, Mr Ludlow, Mr Porter, Sir George Touche, Bart., Mrs Salzmann, Mr and Mrs Monk, Dr Waterhouse, Colonel David Lyell, Mr J Barlow, Mr D Connery, Mr P Forrest, Mr Adams, Dr Cornish, Mr Edgar Middleton, Mr Carey Druce, and Mr Euston Squier. The tradesmen of the village were represented by Messrs A Ryde, W Brooks, Balchin, and W Jeater.*

*Floral tributes were sent by Mrs C J Wills, Mr and Mrs A S Wills, Mr and Mrs J F Wills, Doctor and Mrs Featherstone, Mr and Mrs A J Marsh, Mr and Mrs C L Saunders, Mr and Mrs Frank Reeves, Miss Dora Wills, the grandchildren, Charlie Wills, Liliias and Arthur Wills, Leslie, Philip and John Wills, Kathleen and Dallas Saunders, Guy and Roy Featherstone, Laurence and John Reeves, Mr Wilfred Wills, Mr Fred Wills, the Staff at 28 Victoria Street, the Staff on the Dagenham Housing Contract, Mr and Mrs Ludlow, Indoor and Outdoor Staff at Westcott and Miss Braybrooke, Mr and Mrs T J Reeves, the Rev W H and Miss Dora Austwick, Mr G Pearsall, Mr Robert Holloway, Mr Percy N Meares and family, Major and Mrs H S Meares, Mrs John Price and family, Mr and Mrs J A Reeves, Mr and Mrs G B Sharples, Mr and Mrs P Graham Pollard, Mr John Barlow, Mr J B Burgess, Mr H J Davies, Miss Mary and Ernest Davies, Mr, Mrs and Miss Monk, Mrs Fuchs, Mr and Mrs Euston Squier, Mr Ernest Hollowday, Mr and Mrs D Connery, Mr and Mrs Cory Wright, Mr and Mrs W R Hesketh, Messrs Grundy, Kershaw, Jameson and Co.etc.*

*The funeral arrangements were carried out by Messrs F Davey and Co.*

### **HIS LOVE OF HORSES**

*Mr Wills was a great lover of horses, and one of his great hobbies for some years previous to the war, was to take extended tours through the best scenery in England, under the experienced guidance of Mr F Ludlow, "whose methods of training", says *The Animals' Friend*, "are mainly kindness and firmness". As evidence of the care Mr Ludlow takes of his horses, it may be mentioned that in the tours referred to, averaging 40 miles a day, the animals finished their day's work in as good a condition and spirit, as when they started. It is worthy to note that Mr Ludlow by his methods of training has not required a bit for 40 years.*

*By the death of Mr Wills, Westcott loses a kind and generous friend, always ready to put his hand in his pocket for any good cause, and interested in all social and religious undertakings. He took a prominent part in the rebuilding of the Westcott Schools some ten years ago, and later on became one of the managers, as representative of the County Council, his practical advice and the kindly way in which it was always given being much appreciated by his colleagues.*

**The Times** carried an obituary 26<sup>th</sup> July 1921 which was copied by several local newspapers:

*Mr Charles Joseph Wills, chairman of C J Wills and Sons Limited, and managing partner of Messrs. Price, Wills and Reeves, public works contractors of 28 Victoria Street, Westminster, died on Friday July 22<sup>nd</sup> at Westcott House, near Dorking. Mr Wills had undertaken the construction of many railways and docks at home and abroad.*

*The successful completion of the contract for an important section of the Manchester Ship Canal brought him to the forefront. Prominent among the public works carried out by him are the Barry Docks, the Fraserborough Harbour works, Heysham Harbour, and Immingham Docks, the Famagusta Harbour works in Cyprus, the new breakwaters at Port Said, and the new docks in Bombay. Mr Wills carried out various railway contracts for the Midland, Great Western and Great Central Railway Companies in England, as well as railways works in South Africa and Canada. Dredging work formed an important part of his activities, and the Italian harbours of the Adriatic; the harbours of Cyprus, Suez and Aden bear witness to the success of his labours.*

*During the war Mr Wills undertook heavy engineering works connected with fortifications, submarine defence works, and the provision of oil fuel installations for the navy. On more than one occasion he was thanked by the War Council and Admiralty for the successful results obtained. There is no doubt that the unsparring energy he threw into this work contributed in a large degree to the breakdown in health which resulted in his death.*

**The Engineer** carried a longer, more detailed obituary on August 19<sup>th</sup> 1921:

*The death of Mr. Charles Joseph Wills recently, at the age of seventy-three years, marks the close of a long and successful career. Mr Wills, who was one of our leading English public works contractors, was chairman of the firm C.J.Wills and Sons. Limited, of 28, Victoria Street, Westminster, and managing partner of Messrs. Price, Wills and Reeves, of the same address. His name, which is associated with the construction of many important railway lines and docks in England and abroad, first came into prominence in connection with the construction of the Manchester Ship Canal, of which he carried out a 12-mile section in record time, a fact which not only resulted in a very considerable saving to the Canal Company, but brought to him also many large and important public works contracts.*

*The railway works which he carried out in England include the construction of the Sheffield District Railway, the Sheffield and Dore widening, the Ealing and South Harrow Railway for the Metropolitan District Railway Company, the Woodford and Ilford line and the widening of the main line between Seven Kings and Romford for the Great Eastern Railway. The new main line for the Great Western Railway Company between Castle Cary and Langport, and the widening on to Durston, were carried out by Mr. Wills. Completed well under the contract time, this line now forms part of the Great Western London to Exeter route. The last-named company also entrusted Mr. Wills with the construction of the Birmingham and North Warwickshire Railway, a new line from Acocks Green, on the outskirts of Birmingham, to Bearley and the widening of its existing line from Bearley to Stratford-on-Avon, which provided an important new route between those places. For the Midland Railway Company Mr. Wills constructed the West Riding line, including the Coulsdon Viaduct and Tunnel. Numerous other railway widening and construction works were carried out by him, including extensive works for the Great Central Railway and the construction of the Lincoln to Tuxford Railway for the L.D. and E.C.R., which is now incorporated into the Great Central system. The new tunnel at Newport for the Great Western Railway was a particularly speedy piece of work carried out to relieve the South Wales coal traffic.*

*In dock and harbour construction Mr. Wills carried out some of the well-known works in this country, including the Queen's Dock, Liverpool, the Barry Docks on South Wales, the Heysham Harbour for the Midland Railway Company, and the Immingham Docks on the Humber for the Great Central Railway Company.*

*Mr Wills' name is also associated with many new docks and harbour improvements between England and India. Commencing in the Mediterranean, on the island of Cyprus, he constructed the harbour at Famagusta and the harbour extension at Larnaca. For seven years his dredging plant was engaged in the deepening and improvement of the Italian harbours in the Adriatic. The deepening of the harbour in Alexandria; the construction of the new breakwaters and improvements and the new quays for the*

*harbour at Port Said; the construction of new quays and the deepening of the harbour at Suez; and extensive improvements in the port of Aden, were also effected by him. The last important dock works completed by him were the new docks at Bombay. His activities also extended to South Africa and Canada, and he was called in by the Greek Government to advise it on railway and port improvement projects. He was, furthermore, entrusted with a large portion of Lord Kitchener's irrigation scheme for the Egyptian Government.*

*During the war Mr. Wills placed the whole of his organisation at the disposal of the Government and carried out numerous heavy engineering works, both for the Admiralty and the War Office, his chief work being the construction of a very extensive submarine defence works and oil fuel depots for the Admiralty and fortifications and deep-sea work for the War Office.*

Charles Joseph Wills was survived by his seven children and his second wife. His last will had been drawn up in 1917 and his estate was worth in the region of £350,000. (In the year 2000 the equivalent value was in excess of £40 million). His two sons Arthur and James were named as executors, as well his good friend William Sewell, civil engineer of High Croft, Whitburn, near Sunderland, County Durham.

To his wife Gertrude he left:

*'all my consumable household stores and the right, if she so wishes, to live in my house Wescott, Dorking for a period of one year from my death, rent free, all rates and taxes, all costs of maintenance of the garden and wages of all gardeners and the coachman being defrayed during such period out of my residuary estate. My said wife shall also have the right to select for her absolute use and benefit seven hundred and fifty pounds worth of my furniture. My said wife shall also have the right to use any two of my carriages and any two of my horses which she may select for the period of one year from my death. I give all my plate, household furniture and household effects unto my children to be divided among them as nearly as possible in equal shares.*

*I bequeath the following annuities free of duty, namely to my said wife an annuity of four hundred pounds, to my brother Edmund Frederick Bowring Wills an annuity of eighty pounds, to my sister Matilda Mary Augusta Wills and annuity of eighty pounds, to my sister Edith Elvira Blow an annuity of seventy eight pounds and to my brother Wilfred Wills an annuity of fifty pounds. Each annuity shall commence from the day of my death and shall accrue from day to day, but shall be paid in equal quarterly payments, the first of such payments to be made at the end of three calendar months from my death.*

To each of his five daughters he left £20,000 with instruction that this capital sum should be invested to provide them with a regular income. The eldest daughter, Mary Matilda Featherstone, felt a strong sense of grievance comparing what she and her sisters were left compared with the amount inherited by their eldest brother. It is not known whether this sentiment was shared by her sisters.

Fifteen thousand pounds was left to James Frederick Wills and the residue to Arthur Shaw Wills with the hope that 'he will not sell my house and estate in Dorking, but will reside there'.

Probate was granted in London 5<sup>th</sup> January 1922 to Arthur Shaw Wills and James Frederick Wills, contractors, and William Sewell, civil engineer. The effects were £355,589.00, although much of his wealth was tied up in trust funds and would not form part of the total amount.

Charles Joseph Wills' widow, Gertrude, returned to her family home in Hereford and died in 1950. Arthur Shaw Wills did not move into Westcott House as he preferred his own splendid home, 'High Whykhurst' near Guildford.

Westcott House was offered for sale with vacant possession at The London Auction Mart on 24<sup>th</sup> April 1923 under instruction from Cecil Braithwaite Esq. on behalf of Arthur and James Wills. The sale included an Entrance Lodge, Garages, Stabling, two cottages, a Farmery and extensive grounds. The estate was bought by Gomer H Rees Esq. who lived there until 1931.



Three of the children of Charles Joseph Wills and his wife Frances Amelia were also buried in the Wills plot in Westcott churchyard: James Frederick Wills who died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1930; Ada Beatrice Saunders who died on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1934; and, Dora Jane Wills who died on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1939. The Wills family grave is a handsome burial statement with a large marble angel mounted on a plinth. All the inhabitants of the grave are named around the plinth. In 2018 descendants of the family shared the cost of the restoration of the grave as the church authorities had safety concerns regarding its deterioration.

In 2021, a hundred years after the death of Charles Joseph Wills, Westcott House, completed in 1906, the house which he had built to his own specification for himself and his family, is now Westcott House Care Home specialising in nursing and dementia care.

Elisabeth Reeves Cox  
(great granddaughter of Charles Joseph Wills)  
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