

Joseph William Worthington 1889-1981

A knowledgeable gardener, who became Head Gardener to the Knox family, and Nuneaton Parks Superintendent

By Eileen Worthington

Joseph was born on 22nd February 1889 in Higham on the Hill, Leicestershire, the eldest child of William and Clara Worthington. He had a brother Alfred and sisters Elsie and Ada Lilian. Another brother Henry died in infancy. Higham was a small agricultural village, where the residents were agricultural labourers (including Joseph's father), or were in occupations serving the village, such as blacksmith, dressmaker, teacher, shopkeeper, carpenter, shoe maker and workers on the railway. These can be seen in the 1891 and 1901 censuses for Higham.

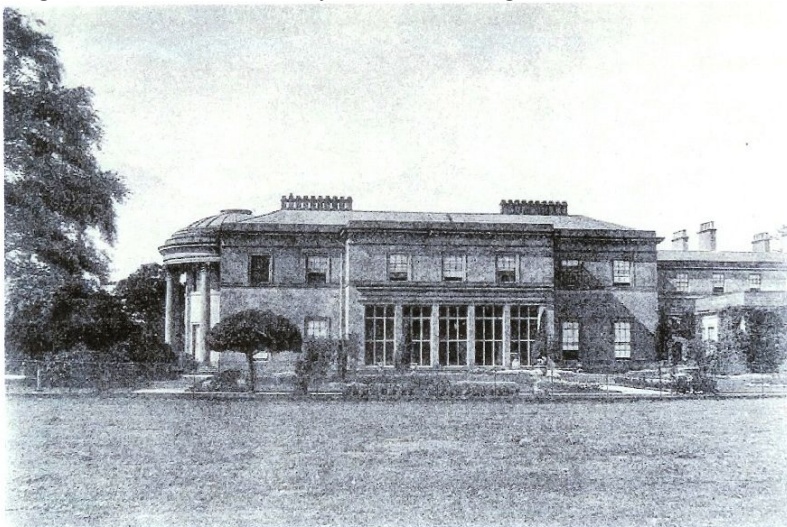


Joseph Worthington (1889-1981)

In and around Higham there were some larger buildings – eg Higham Grange, Higham Hall, Lindley Lodge (a boarding school for boys, with servants and 5 teachers), and Lindley Grange. These provided employment for young people, eg as servants, maids, cooks, and gardeners. The village school, which is still used, was built in 1838. Joseph started school there aged 3 on 21 March, 1892, and left on 2 December 1901 to go to work.

By 1911, when Joseph was 22, he had moved from Higham to work as 'First Gardener' at Willey Park, a grand house and estate at Broseley (near Ironbridge), Shropshire. He had lodgings in a cottage on the estate, with the Head Gardener and Second Gardener. The estate and hall belonged to the peer Cecil

Forester, Baron. In the census entry for 1911, there are an impressive number of servants – footmen, maids, grooms, cook, and many estate buildings.



*Willey Hall, Shropshire - at Broseley.
Developed by Cecil Weld-Forester, 1812-1820,
surrounded by gardens & parkland, with pools,
hothouses, woods, formal gardens. There had
been an older Hall, which was demolished
in 1812. This newer Hall is now a listed building.*

How did Joseph acquire this job? Possibly by word of mouth – maybe a relative of someone on the estate lived in Higham? Or was he recommended by one of the families in the big houses in Higham? It was a considerable distance for Joseph to move. Possibly the first part of his journey was by train from Higham – there used to be a railway line and station. Joseph gained a wealth of gardening experience in these early years, and he had also worked on gardens and the allotment at home after school, with his brother Alfred. Gardening became his career.

Around this time, he met Eliza Presgraves, a young woman from near Oakham, Rutland. In 1911 she was in service with a Doctor's family in Market Overton. They were married on 29th Dec 1913 in Hinckley Register Office. Joseph was described as a gardener, living at The Gardens, Buckminster Park, near Grantham, Leics. Eliza's address was given as Higham. She and Joseph then lived in Higham, where Elsie May was born in Feb. 1914. Their son Joseph William was born in Nuneaton in 1922, after World War 1. Joseph senior served in World War 1, in the Warwickshire Regiment, and was part of a 2-man Lewis gun team. He was sent home when injured (shot through the wrist) but returned to fight later.

Joseph became Head Gardener for the Knox family, who lived in Knox House, Higham Lane, Nuneaton (which is now The Chase Hotel). He and his family lived at Briar's Cottage, next door, which was the

Head Gardener's house. (Son Joseph was born there, 1922.) This house was willed to Joseph in James Knox's will, and he lived there for the rest of his life. James Knox was a Scottish civil engineer, who helped to turn Haunchwood Brick and Tile Works into a hugely successful brick-making business.



Briars Cottage, Higham Lane Nuneaton



Joe, Elsie, Eliza & Joe Jnr. Briars Cottage, Higham Lane.



The Worthington family at Briars Cottage, World War Two.

Sometime after Knox House was sold by auction in 1935, Joseph became Nuneaton Parks Superintendent. He must have been involved with many projects in the park. He also supervised the planting of the trees along Higham Lane. He was a keen supporter of the Allotments association in Nuneaton, and helped with the judging of the allotments every year, and also with the judging at the annual produce show which included flowers and baking, too.

In 1954, Joseph retired from the park aged 65, and lived happily at Briar's Cottage with his second wife Nellie Shaw, whom he'd married at Nuneaton Parish Church in 1949. Eliza had died in 1947. Joseph had two Silver Weddings – one with Eliza, and one with Nellie. He became a Great Grandfather. He died peacefully in his sleep one night, at Briar's Cottage in 1981, after a long and very contented life.

Written by Eileen Worthington in 2011 and updated in 2012. Updated in 2013 after obtaining the 1913 marriage certificate.