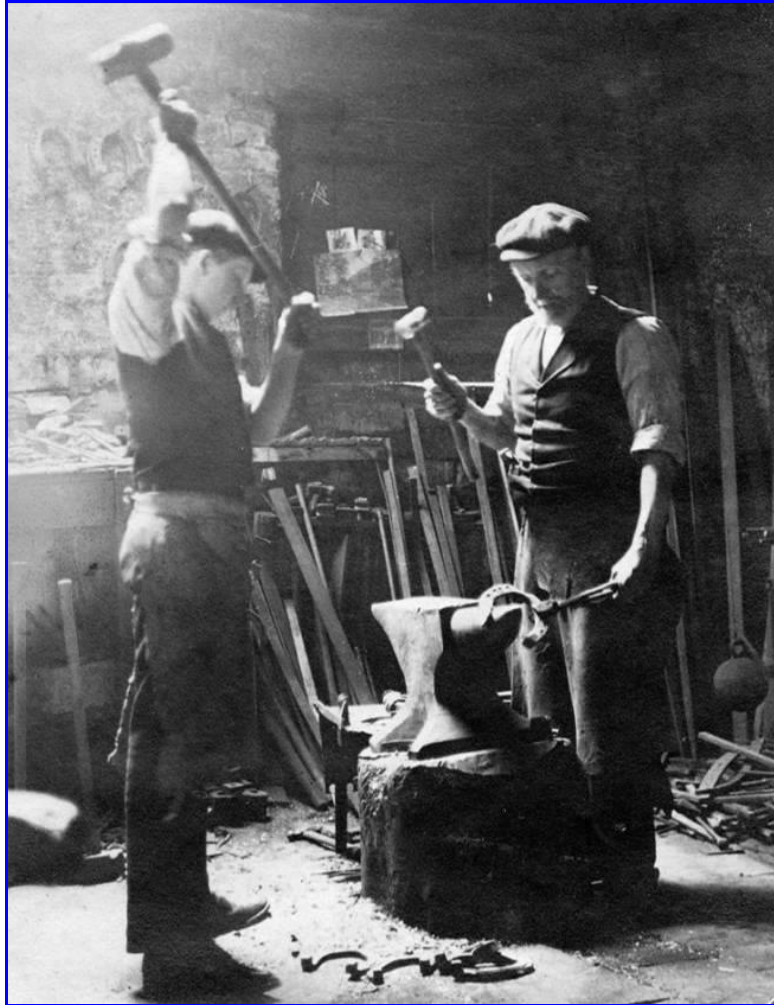


# OSGATHORPE'S BLACKSMITHS



A FARRIER FORGING A HORSE SHOE

BY SAMUEL T STEWART - JANUARY 2024

## PREFACE

In simple terms a Blacksmith is a *craftsman who fabricates objects out of iron by hot and cold forging on an anvil*. Blacksmiths who 'specialised' in the forging of shoes for horses were called farriers.

The blacksmith's essential equipment consists of a forge, or furnace, in which smelted iron is heated so that it can be worked easily; an anvil, a heavy, firmly secured, steel-surfaced block upon which the piece of iron is worked; tongs to hold the iron on the anvil; and hammers, chisels, and other implements to cut, shape, flatten, or weld the iron into the desired object. *See the front cover photograph*.

Blacksmiths made an immense variety of common objects used in everyday life: nails, screws, bolts, and other fasteners; sickles, ploughshares, axes, and other agricultural implements; hammers and other tools used by artisans; candlesticks and other household objects; swords, shields, and armour; wheel rims and other metal parts in wagons and carriages; fireplace fittings and implements; spikes, chains, and cables used on ships; and the ironwork, both functional and decorative, used in furniture and in the building trades.

The blacksmith's most frequent occupation, however, was farriery. In horseshoeing, the blacksmith first cleans and shapes the sole and rim of the horse's hoof with rasps and knives, a process painless to the animal owing to the tough, horny, and nerveless character of the hoof. He then selects a U-shaped iron shoe of appropriate size from his stock and, heating it red-hot in a forge, modifies its shape to fit the hoof, cools it by quenching it in water, and affixes it to the hoof with nails.

Most towns and villages had a blacksmith's shop where horses were shod and tools, farm implements, and wagons and carriages were repaired. The ubiquity of the profession can be inferred, in the English-speaking world, from the prevalence of the surname "Smith." Blacksmiths also came to be general-purpose repairers of farm equipment and other machinery in the 19th century. By then, however, blacksmithing was already on the decline, as more and more metal articles formerly made by hand were shaped in factories by machines or made by inexpensive casting processes. In the industrialised world, even the blacksmith's mainstay, farriery, has greatly declined with the disappearance of horses from use in agriculture and transport.

### *The Village Blacksmith*

[Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#) 1807-1882

Under a spreading chestnut-tree  
The village smithy stands;  
The smith, a mighty man is he,  
With large and sinewy hands,  
And the muscles of his brawny arms  
Are strong as iron bands.

His hair is crisp, and black, and long;  
His face is like the tan;  
His brow is wet with honest sweat,  
He earns whate'er he can,

And looks the whole world in the face,  
For he owes not any man.

Week in, week out, from morn till night,  
You can hear his bellows blow;  
You can hear him swing his heavy sledge,  
With measured beat and slow,  
Like a sexton ringing the village bell,  
When the evening sun is low.

And children coming home from school  
Look in at the open door;  
They love to see the flaming forge,  
And hear the bellows roar,  
And catch the burning sparks that fly  
Like chaff from a threshing-floor.

He goes on Sunday to the church,  
And sits among his boys;  
He hears the parson pray and preach,  
He hears his daughter's voice  
Singing in the village choir,  
And it makes his heart rejoice.

It sounds to him like her mother's voice  
Singing in Paradise!  
He needs must think of her once more,  
How in the grave she lies;  
And with his hard, rough hand he wipes  
A tear out of his eyes.

Toiling,—rejoicing,—sorrowing,  
Onward through life he goes;  
Each morning sees some task begin,  
Each evening sees it close;  
Something attempted, something done,  
Has earned a night's repose.

Thanks, thanks to thee, my worthy friend,  
For the lesson thou hast taught!  
Thus at the flaming forge of life  
Our fortunes must be wrought;  
Thus on its sounding anvil shaped  
Each burning deed and thought.

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Osgathorpe had several Blacksmith's and Blacksmith's Shops in various locations in the village, as most outlying villages like Griffydam, Pegg's Green, Worthington, Swannington and Coleorton did for example. However, Osgathorpe seemed to have had more than most, presumably due to the intensity of farming which took place here that required repairs to machinery, waggons and horse shoeing etc. Blacksmiths usually combined farming with blacksmithing in order to supplement their income.

A comprehensive chart of Blacksmiths operating in Osgathorpe is appended. We unfortunately only have knowledge of where two of the blacksmith's shops were located with any certainty, these being William Gilbert's and Joseph Billings' and their location is shown on the maps at the end of this publication.

### **THOMAS CLARKE**

The oldest record found of a Blacksmith living in Osgathorpe found by the author was Thomas Clarke. The Churchwarden's records show that he was supplying ironwork, *nails* and fastenings from 1690 to 1712 for the church bell wheels and the church gate.

### **STEPHEN AND WILLIAM BAILEY**

The next oldest record found for a Blacksmith in Osgathorpe was for William Bailey who is listed in an 1830 Poll record to elect two knights of the Shire. He was allowed to vote on the basis he owned property. By 1841, Ann Bailey, William's wife and then a widow, and her two sons William and Stephen are listed as Blacksmiths in the one household. In William White's trade directory of 1846, Stephen and William Bailey are now living together and recorded as Blacksmith's and Graziers. By 1851, William is given as a farmer of 36 acres and Stephen is living with him as the Blacksmith. Stephen is recorded in a trade directory as still being a Blacksmith in 1863, but had disappeared by the 1871 census.

### **STEPHEN DEAVILLE**

Stephen Deaville a nephew of Stephen Bailey above who was born in Woodhouse Eaves, is listed as a Blacksmith in the 1861 and 1871 censuses, but in an 1876 trade directory he is just given as a farmer, and by the 1881 census had disappeared.

### **WILLIAM GILBERT**

William Gilbert was probably the most skilled Blacksmith in Osgathorpe and is recorded as being a "Master Blacksmith" there from 1841 to 1881, but he could have been doing this work as well as farming for even longer than that. In 1881, William, then aged 62, is still operating as a Blacksmith. William was born and bred in Osgathorpe and spent all his life there. He was born in Osgathorpe in 1818 and married Jane Barsby (1823-1877) in 1848 at the age of 25. They had 8 children but unfortunately Jane died at the age of 54. **William is recorded as being the village constable (as was his brother) in 1864, 1869 and 1872. No doubt, being a blacksmith, he would have been an imposing figure around the village. The**

following newspaper articles record William in action during a fracas at the Royal Oak public house in Osgathorpe.

Transcribed from the Leicester Journal – October 7<sup>th</sup> 1864

### Ashby de la Zouch Police Court

### Murderous Assault at Osgathorpe

At the Police Court on the 29<sup>th</sup> September, before W. W. Abney and H. E. Smith, Esqrs., Benjamin Platts, of Griffydham (a man well known to the police), Jesse Hodges, of Pegg's Green, and Aaron Stewart (*no doubt a relative of the author*), of Coleorton, were charged by Wm. Gilbert, parish constable of Osgathorpe, with assaulting him whilst in the execution of his duty, on the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> instant. It appeared from the evidence of Gilbert, that he was sent for by Mr. Rennocks, landlord of the Royal Oak, to quell a disturbance and fight which had arisen there, Stewart being the ring leader. This he did at the time; but it being the wake, there were many people assembled in the village drinking, amongst whom were the prisoners, companion's of Stewart, who immediately sent for the "Griffydham lot", who were at another public house drinking. They immediately repaired to the scene of action, and declared that Stewart should fight in the defence of everyone. Gilbert again attempted to interfere, and drew his staff. The three prisoners, with others not yet in custody, immediately seized him and dragged him out into the street, and while Platts took his staff and held him, the other prisoners brutally beat him about the head and face, kicking him also on other parts of his body, when he was rescued by his brother constable and others, who at once sent to Whitwick for the police. They were soon on the spot, but the prisoners had been decamped, after in vain attempting to gain an entrance into Rennock's house, where Gilbert had been taken. A warrant was immediately issued for their apprehension, which was placed in the hands of P.S. Peberdy, who succeeded in apprehending Platts at his house. P.C. Challoner captured Hodges, and P.C. Smith after some difficulty, descended No.2. Swannington Pit on Monday evening last, and captured Stewart whilst at work. He was much surprised at the officer's intrusion. – **The prisoners were all committed to trial at the next quarter session.**

### THE TRIAL

Leicester Chronicle October 22<sup>nd</sup> 1864

### ASSAULT AT OSGATHORPE WAKE.

Benjamin Platts (34), miner, Jesse Hodges (24), miner, and Aaron Stewart (on bail) were indicted for unlawfully assaulting and beating Wm. Gilbert, parish constable, in the execution of his duty at Osgathorpe, on the 24th September last. — Mr. Palmer prosecuted; Mr. Merewether defended Hodges and Mr. Bennett defended Platts; Stewart was defended by Mr. Inglesant.

Wm. Gilbert deposed that he was parish constable at Osgathorpe last September. On the 24th of that month, at night, he was summoned to the Royal Oak by Mr. Rennocks, to stop a fight that was going on. It was the wake at Osgathorpe. Went to the dancing room, where, amongst others, was Aaron Stewart, who was fighting with Samuel Rowe. Told Stewart he must not fight now he (the parish constable) had come. Rowe knew him quite well. Directly after that, he saw Hodges in the dancing room. He came up to him, put his fists on his neck, and kept shoving him about. At the request of the landlord witness stopped the dancing, and took Hodges to the door, and asked him to go away quietly, and he did so. Afterwards,

several persons came to the house, amongst whom were the three prisoners. At that time Rowe was drinking, and Stewart was pushed upon Rowe, and that caused Rowe and Stewart to fight. Witness tried to separate them, when Platts struck him on both cheeks. Afterwards, he was again going to separate the combatants, and drew his staff to protect himself, when Platts laid hold of it and asked what he was going to do with that stick. After some difficulty he got up to Stewart and Rowe, and laid hold of the latter. Platts still kept hold of his staff, and he (witness) ultimately made his escape from the house, receiving in his exit a number of blows from various people. He saw Hodges strike him. Platts was pulling at the staff all the time. His clothes were torn. Witness was also taken to a wall and thrown across it by Platts among others. He was much kicked about the legs; his eyes were cut in three places, and his coat and waistcoat were running down with blood. In consequence of the injuries he had received he was unable to attend to his business for a week. Afterwards he sent information to the police at Whitwick. He could speak with confidence to the three prisoners. — Wm. Wardle, another parish constable of Osgathorpe, said on the night of the 24th Sept. he saw Aaron Stewart and Hodges "pitching into" Gilbert, who was kneeling on the ground outside the public house, and Platts trying to take his staff from him. Blood was streaming from Gilbert's face. — By Mr. Merewether: Lifted Gilbert up and took him into the house. Did not use his staff, because he was not struck. Did not keep the people back from Gilbert: he could not do so when he was assisting him into the house. Besides, he did not want his brains knocking out. He knew the men he had to deal with, and had "his son to take care on." — Samuel Rowe and William Rennocks, son of the landlord of the Royal Oak, gave evidence to a similar effect. — Mr. Bennett, Mr. Merewether, and Mr. Inglesant having each addressed the court on behalf of their respective clients, commenting on the discrepancy of the evidence, and submitting that from the confusion which was rampant at the public house on the night of the alleged assault, and the probable state of the witnesses on the occasion, the evidence on behalf of the prosecution could not be relied upon. — Several witnesses were called to character on behalf of Hodges and Stewart. — The Chairman summed up the evidence, and the jury found Platts guilty; Hodges guilty, with a recommendation to mercy on account of his good character; and Stewart not guilty. — **Platts was sentenced to four months and Hodges to twenty-one days hard labour.**



**THE ROYAL OAK PUBLIC HOUSE**

## **JOSEPH BILLINGS**

Joseph Billings, who was born in Naseby, Northants, was a farmer / blacksmith / grazier in Osgathorpe for at least 40 years, being first recorded in the 1871 census as such and finally in the 1911 census as a blacksmith and grazier. In the 1911 census, Joseph (61) and his wife Ruth (60) who had been married for 40 years, are recorded as having had 14 children, two of whom had died. At this time, their two sons Henry and James are living with them and working at Cottage Farm where he lived and had his blacksmith's shop for at least 30 years.

**See the following maps showing where both William Gilbert's and Joseph Billing's blacksmith shops were.**

## **WILLIAM POPLEY DUNSMORE**

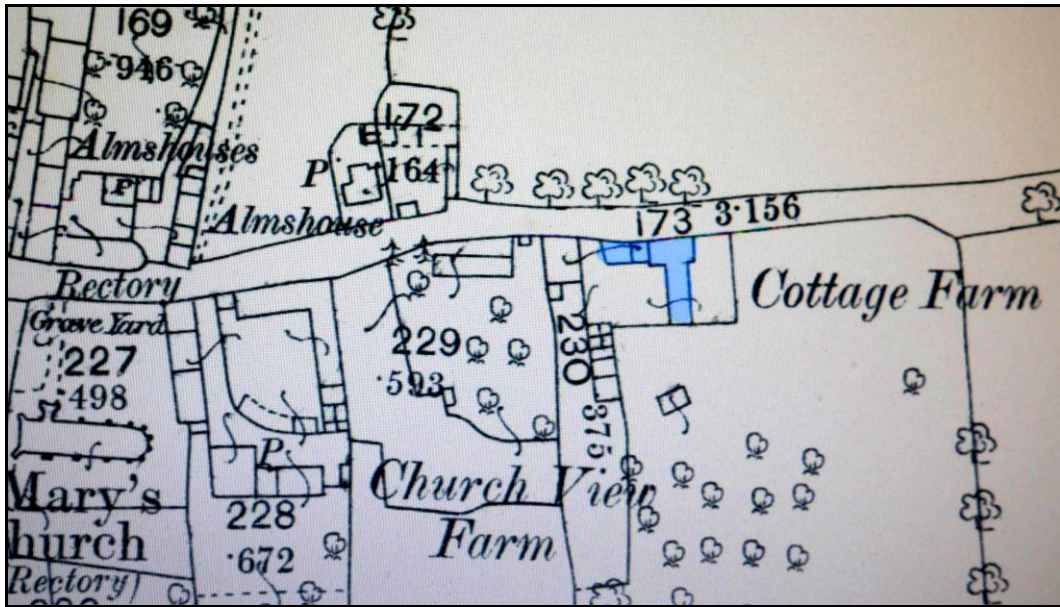
The last record of a Blacksmith found in Osgathorpe was William Popley Dunsmore in the 1911 census and Kelly's 1912 trade directory. There was no record of a Blacksmith in the last Kelly's 1916 trade directory for the area..

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## TRADE DIRECTORY & CENSUS RECORDS

DATE	BLACKSMITH NAMES
TRADE DIRECTORY 1846	WILLIAM & STEPHEN BAILEY
	WILLIAM GILBERT
TRADE DIRECTORY 1854	WILLIAM & STEPHEN BAILEY
	WILLIAM GILBERT
TRADE DIRECTORY 1855	WILLIAM BAILEY
	WILLIAM GILBERT
TRADE DIRECTORY 1861	STEPHEN BAILEY
	WILLIAM GILBERT
TRADE DIRECTORY 1863	STEPHEN BAILEY
	WILLIAM GILBERT
TRADE DIRECTORY 1870	STEPHEN DEAVILLE
	WILLIAM GILBERT
TRADE DIRECTORY 1876	SAMUEL FARMER
	WILLIAM GILBERT
TRADE DIRECTORY 1891	JOSEPH BILLINGS
TRADE DIRECTORY 1908	NO BLACKSMITH GIVEN
TRADE DIRECTORY 1912	WILLIAM POPLEY DUNSMORE
TRADE DIRECTORY 1916	NO BLACKSMITH GIVEN
OSGATHORPE CENSUS 1841	ANN, WILLIAM & STEPHEN BAILEY, JOSEPH BROOKS (JUNIOR), GEORGE ADKIN (APPRENTICE)
	WILLIAM GILBERT
OSGATHORPE CENSUS 1851	WILLIAM GILBERT
	STEPHEN BAILEY
OSGATHORPE 1861 CENSUS	WILLIAM GILBERT (MASTER BLACKSMITH)
	STEPHEN BAILEY
	STEPHEN DEAVILLE (nephew of above and born in Woodhouse, Leics)
OSGATHORPE 1871 CENSUS	WILLIAM GILBERT, WILLIAM GADESBY, STEPHEN DEAVILLE
OSGATHORPE 1871/ 1881 /1901 / 1911 CENSUS	JOSEPH BILLINGS
OSGATHORPE 1911 CENSUS	WILLIAM POPLEY DUNSMORE





**1883 issued 25 inch O/S map**

Joseph Billings was both a farmer / grazier and master blacksmith in Osgathorpe for at least 40 years, first appearing in the 1871 census and finally in the 1911 census. He was Blacksmithing at Cottage Farm coloured blue for at least 30 years.



**The location of a William Gilbert's former Blacksmith Shop & Forge shown on the 1883 issued 25 inch O/S map.**

Apparently, the forge was still in the NE corner of the barn when it was sold in 2000. William was a Master Blacksmith for some 30 years.