

WILLIAM GEORGE STICKLAND M.B.E. – THE WESSEX WIZARD

b. 1902 - d. 1983



For those of you who have read the West Moors Miscellany pages you will probably be already very familiar with the Stickland family and their links with West Moors and surrounding areas. This is the story of

For those that are not aware then let me put this in context. At the start of the 20th Century, around 1902 or thereabouts Walter Stephen Stickland took over the West Moors village store originally ran by George Cosser. The Stickland store became an important trading post in the village for many years with local people buying their provisions and household items from Sticklands (and no doubt exchanging gossip also).

Walter and his wife Mary Agnes (nee Frampton) ran the store between them and by all accounts were very popular. They had four children in total, two of whom sadly died whilst in their infancy, however William George was born in 1902 and Bertha Irene (born 1905) went on to live until a ripe old age.

I am going to concentrate on their son William George, who, instead of following his father into the running of the store, William Stickland (known as Bill) went on to run an Estate Agency in Victoria Road, Ferndown.

On the 8th November 1927, William, at the age of 25 William married an attractive West Moors girl Gwendoline May Baker (known as Poppy). What is not clear is whether or not

Gwendoline knew how successful Bill's magician sideline was to become when they got married or whether she thought that he was just Bill, the local Estate Agent with an unusual hobby. Bill was in fact a very accomplished magician performing highly unusual magic tricks, shadow tricks, marionettes and was an expert in ventriloquism. His magical hobby was paying the bills.

Bill's fascination with magic apparently began when he saw a magician at a Sunday School party and received a Magic Box with tricks and wands shortly afterwards for Christmas and he called himself 'The Wessex Wizard'. I can imagine Bill as a child practising his magic tricks on customers as they came into the store in West Moors. What fun he must have had and the customers also.

After Bill and Gwen married, the glamorous Poppy as she was known, joined Bill performing and together they were known as Marius and Mariette, during the war years they joined E.N.S.A and performed for troops in Europe – they were one of the first entertainers to cross the Rhine and performed to large crowds in Hamburg and elsewhere.

'The Wessex Wizard' was a magician very different from others around at that time and he was one of the earliest contributors to both the '*Linking Ring*' and the '*Budget*'. He appeared regularly at the Ring events in London and also at the first convention in Cheltenham in 1931. His magic was unusual and would not work for everybody, his themed presentations - for example his Tennis act, his Dice Man act and his remarkable 'Living Marionettes' were long remembered for a long time by all those that went to see him.

In 1932 Bill attended a dinner of the British Ring of the International Brotherhood of Magicians and was amazed and surprised when he was made its secretary. He had no intention of being a permanent Secretary for any longer than he needed as he thought he was not right for the job, but he remained in post for over 50 years, until his death in 1983. During this time membership of the society increased from 62 to over 1600. He was also the first British president of the International Brotherhood of Magicians from 1970-71 and an honorary member of the Inner Magic Circle. He was awarded an M.B.E. for his services to magic – a very rare achievement. I believe this was after his wife Poppy had died as his sister Bertha went with him to collect it.

Bill continued to live in the Ferndown area until he died in 1983, his house in Dudsbury Crescent was called 'The Wand'. An Amazing local, I think you will agree.

Linda Postawa