

The Henderson Legacy

From New York to Abbots Langley: the history of the Henderson Family and the Henderson Memorial Hall

Introduction

The Watford Observer dated Saturday 27 December 1902 reported “Mr. H. W. Henderson, of Serge Hill, has just presented a very handsomely built and most commodious village room to this place. It was, by the way, the very thing that had long been wanted, and the parish owes a deep debt of gratitude to the generous donor, whose only wish seems to be that it should be used and appreciated to the fullest extent.”



Inside the building between the front windows is a brass plaque which reads “Erected in loving memory of Elvira Henderson by her husband for the perpetual use of the Church and the village of Abbots Langley 1902.” However, this was not mentioned in the newspaper article which described the building as a

village room, and this was how it was named for decades in the minutes of trustee meetings, reports in newspapers and on maps. Only much later in its history did it become officially known as the Henderson Memorial Hall, well after Henry Henderson left the village in 1920.

Today the hall has undergone a renaissance thanks to the involvement of the Henderson HUB which was established by a group of local residents who wanted to encourage involvement in the arts using the village hall as its base. It offers local residents space in which to partake in a range of visual, literary and performing arts, and it includes Elvira’s Foyer where residents can relax with refreshments.



This article explores the origins of the Henderson family, their involvement in our village, the tragic death of Elvira at the age of 31, the contributions to the community by her husband and children, and the surprising return to our village of her son Ronald in 1956.

Aline Lefebvre

Aline was Elvira's mother. She was born on 23 January 1853 in Southwark, one of the poorest parts of London. The family were immigrants from France and within seven years of Aline's birth they had emigrated to America. The 1860 census recorded Aline and her sister Maria living with their father Louis and mother Susan in Ward 1, District 8, New York. Louis Lefebvre was listed as a hat maker.

At the time of the next census in 1870 the family had moved to another district of New York and Aline was pregnant. According to family accounts, she left home that year and eloped with Tomas de Orihuela who had been employed to teach Spanish to Aline and Maria. There is no evidence of a marriage between Tomas and Aline, although when their daughter was born on 23 September 1870 she was named Elvira de Orihuela, maybe in order to maintain a degree of respectability. Tomas died less than five years later on 31 May 1875.

From her birth in Southwark to her childhood in New York, Aline was associated with her family's hat making business. Life changed for Aline and her daughter after the death of Tomas. They travelled to London where in 1879 she married Joseph Todd. She died on 16 February 1924 and was buried in the grounds of the Morenish Memorial Chapel in Scotland on her husband's baronial estate.



Joseph Todd



Joseph was born in Stirling in 1846. His father, William, a calico engraver, died six months later and his mother died when Joseph was ten years old. Despite his humble beginnings and tragic childhood, Joseph grew up to make his fortune as an international railway tycoon and became one of the wealthiest men in Britain. He emigrated to the West Indies aged 19 and became a merchant banker in Havana until 1885. He was appointed chairman of the Cuban Central Railway Company and he had other railway interests in South America and Spain. He married Aline on 14 June 1879 at St George's, Hanover Square, and their London residence was 33 Eaton Place, Belgravia. He was knighted on 20 June 1913 and became a baron at which time he changed his name by royal license to Sir Joseph White Todd. He had an extensive baronial estate in Morenish on

the banks of Loch Tay. After his wife's death in 1924 he remarried but he survived only two more years and was buried alongside Aline in the grounds of the Morenish Memorial Chapel. His estate was valued at £154,969 19s. 11d. which in today's terms is nearly £9 million.

Elvira de Orihuela and Henry William Henderson

Elvira was born in New York on 23 September 1870, the only daughter of Aline and Tomas de Orihuela. After Tomas' death in 1875, Elvira travelled to England with her mother and they settled in Ealing. Nearby lived Henry William Henderson, also known as Harry, the brother and right hand man of Alexander Henderson, the first Lord Faringdon, who made a fortune financing railways across Argentina and Spain. Their stockbrokers business was involved in the financing of Sir Joseph's railway enterprises in Spain, Cuba, Uruguay and Argentina.

Elvira and Henry married on 14 June 1890 and by 1891 they had a daughter and had moved to Chelsea. By the spring of 1901 they had four children and had moved to 9 Princes Gardens in Kensington. Living with them were a governess, two nurses, a butler, two



footmen, a boot boy, a cook, a lodge maid and four housemaids. In 1898 the family had taken a lease from the Solly family of an out-of-town residence at Serge Hill in Bedmond. They spent weekends at Serge Hill, attended St. Lawrence Church and played an active part in the village affairs of Bedmond and Abbots Langley.

Elvira died in childbirth at her Kensington home on 18 December 1901. Henry and his four surviving children continued to be involved in our community, supporting local men who served during the 1914/18 conflict and later raising funds for the war memorial in 1919. The Henderson's family ties to Abbots Langley began to unravel in 1920 when their tenancy of Serge Hill expired and the Solly family auctioned the freehold of their extensive Bedmond estates. Henry Henderson moved to West Woodhay, a country house near Newbury where one of his descendants continues to live today.

Elvira's Death

Elvira's sudden death in London and her funeral at St Lawrence Church were reported in the Watford Observer dated 28 December 1901 and in the Parish Magazine dated January 1902. "The funeral took place at Abbots Langley Church on Saturday at three o'clock. The body, which had been brought by rail to Watford, was already in the church, which was filled with relatives and friends, many of them coming from town. A large number of residents were also present including many people from Bedmond." The report described the committal. "The grave had been lined with flowers, &c., and there were about a hundred beautiful floral tokens of love and affection for the departed and of sympathy for the sorrowing relatives." Elvira's body was laid to rest in the ground.



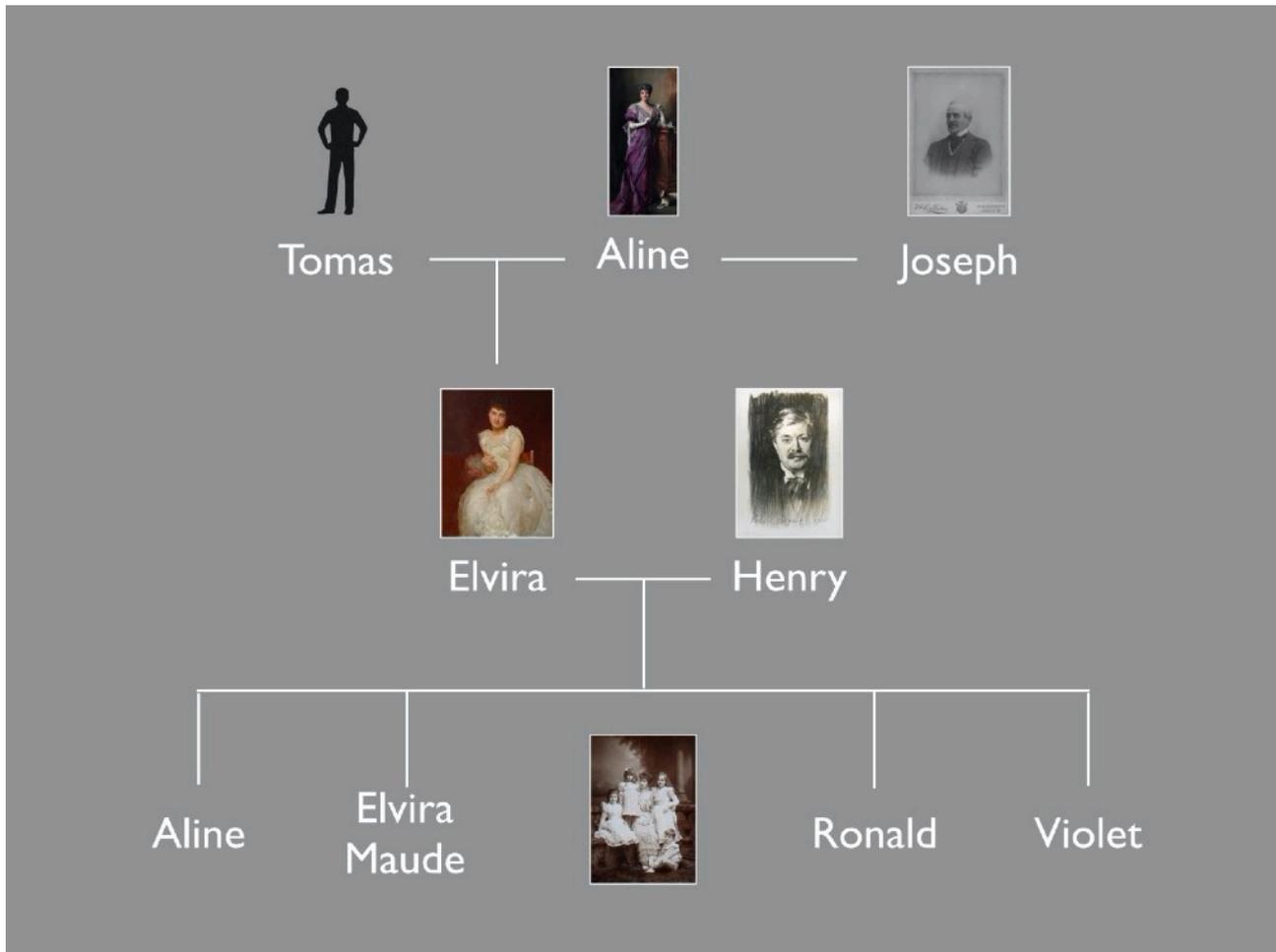
The Tomb

The ornate sarcophagus that we see today was added later. It is a grade II listed structure described by Historic England as "Henderson Memorial 10 metres north west of the Church of St Lawrence - a



chest tomb for Mrs Elvira Henderson, died 1901 in ashlar with ornamental copper. A low rectangular tomb in Art Nouveau style, a copper moulded base with stylised trees rising at the angles and along the longer sides to projecting capping with bold raised lettering and foliate ornament to a smaller upper stone cap."

The Henderson/Todd Family Tree



The Village Room

According to information sourced from the Parish Magazine and the Watford Observer there had been a previous suggestion from Howard Gilliat of Cecil Lodge that a hall should be built to commemorate the Jubilee of 1887, but to no avail, despite his offer of £100 towards the cost. It was recognised by Vicar Parnell, when he gave his thoughts on the matter, that a room where technical classes, concerts, lectures and meetings could be held was certainly needed. In 1902 the vicar proposed that all proceeds from any sales or fund raising be put towards the purchase of an iron room (probably a corrugated iron shed), although he felt that a more permanent hall would be preferred. Perhaps it was from these thoughts and suggestions that Mr Henderson was prompted to act when he decided on the idea to link the need of a village hall with that of a permanent memorial to his young wife Elvira.

The Watford Observer dated Saturday 7 June 1902 reported "Mr H. W. Henderson, of Serge Hill, is making a munificent gift to the church in the

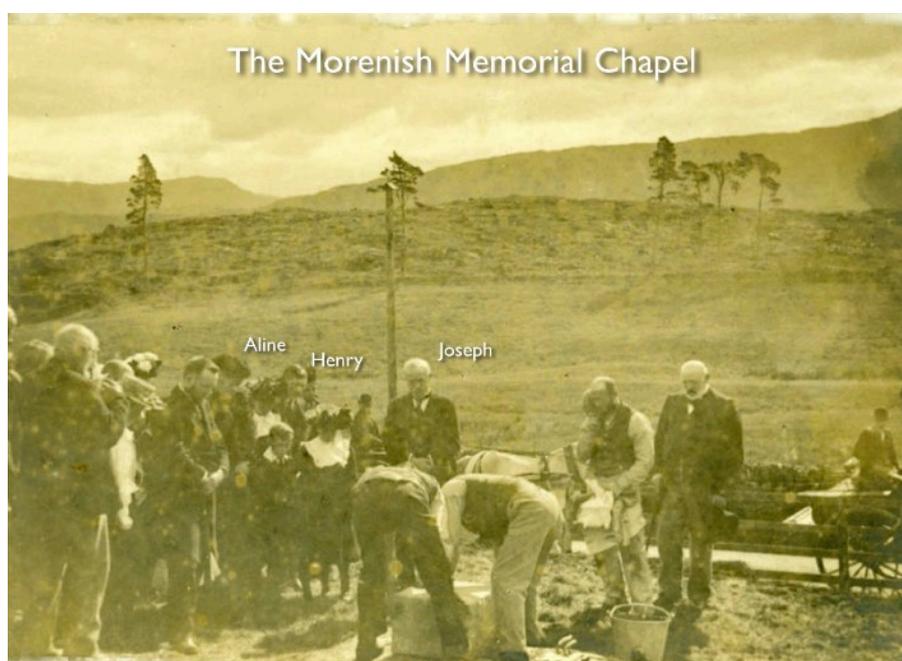


shape of a very handsome church room, which is now in the course of erection.” The report continued with a description of the project and Henry’s involvement. “All the parish must appreciate the donor’s most generous present - another conspicuous example of the lively interest he takes in the welfare of the place, an interest so largely shared in by the late Mrs. Henderson.”

The project was completed in December 1902 and included a brass plaque in memory of Elvira. Nevertheless, the hall was modestly named “The Village Room” and was vested in the St Albans Diocesan Trust under the management of the vicar, the churchwardens, the chairman of the Parish Council (who was Mr H W Henderson) together with Mr R D Cleasby of Cecil Lodge and Mr Inett Ward of the Manor House. The room was to be used “for any meetings, or for any objects, ends or purposes having in view the spiritual, intellectual, or moral or social wants of the people.”

The Morenish Memorial Chapel

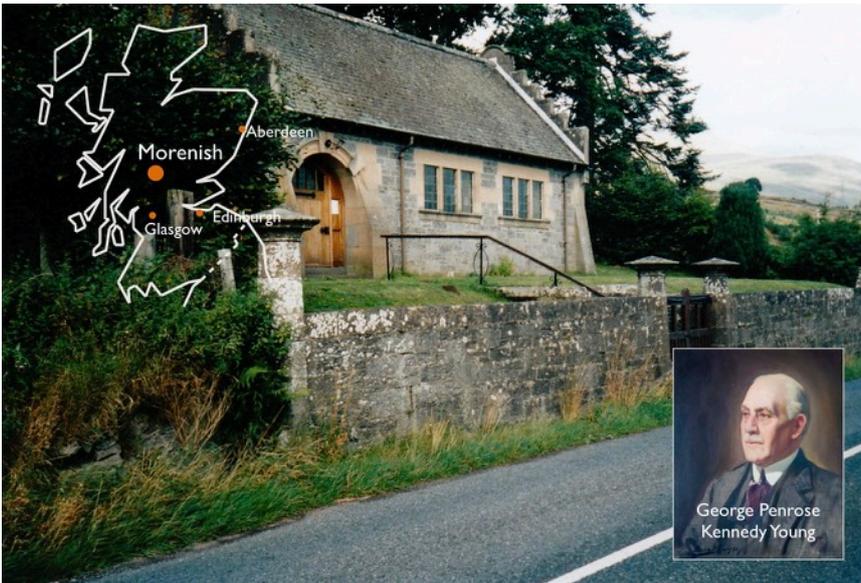
At around the same time that Henry Henderson had agreed to underwrite the cost of constructing the Village Room, Elvira’s mother Aline was formulating plans for a memorial chapel on her husband’s baronial estate in Scotland. Aline’s diary written in 1890/91 describes Elvira’s love of the Morenish estate and her walks overlooking Loch Tay where the chapel was eventually built.



The foundation stone for the chapel was laid during the summer of 1902. A photograph recording the event shows Aline Todd, her husband Joseph, Henry Henderson and three of his four children attending the ceremony. The chapel was completed in 1903 and a report in *The Scotsman* dated 25 August 1903 records its opening. “The building is of stone and finished inside with oak. It presents a very neat and tasteful appearance. In the east end there has been erected a very beautiful window, bought in America and costing £1,300.”

In recent times services were held in the chapel between May and October on the first Sunday of every month until 2014 when the visiting minister, the Rev John Lincoln retired. The chapel was sold by the Church of Scotland in 2015 and is now in private hands. The stained glass window was removed prior to sale and was transported to a stained glass studio in Edinburgh for renovation.

The chapel is now a listed building and is described in detail in the the listing decision of 23 December 2015 by Historic Environment Scotland. Unfortunately, the listing took



place after the window had been removed but it is nevertheless referred to in the decision notice. “The window, the centrepiece of which depicted Elvira and her four children, was the largest of only four windows in Scotland by Louis Comfort Tiffany’s Studios of New York.” The interior of the chapel is described as containing richly symbolic Arts and Crafts detailing with high quality materials including ashlar and handcrafted

ironwork and tiling. “Externally there are Neo-Baroque and Art Nouveau details mixed with Arts and Crafts style and stylistically it is similar to the work of George Penrose Kennedy Young of Glasgow although, as yet, there is no evidence to confirm this.”

Violet Henderson

Violet, the youngest of Elvira’s daughters was very active in village affairs during and after the First World War. In January 1915 the Parish Magazine reported her appeal for funds to send Christmas gifts to the troops. “Miss Violet Henderson has received so many kind donations that she has been able to send presents of plum puddings, cakes, chocolate, tobacco and cigarettes with a Christmas card of good wishes from Abbots Langley and Bedmond to every soldier from this parish now serving with the Colours - 14 are at the front, 1 in India, 6 in Egypt, 1 in Malta and about 108 at home.” In December 1916 she put on a concert raising £32 for the troops and her appeal raised a further £62 towards 300 parcels dispatched to all parts of the world. In October 1918 it was reported in the magazine “Miss Violet Henderson has once again, for the fifth time, most kindly promised to send out the Christmas parcels from the parish to our sailors,



soldiers and airmen.” and “Miss Violet Henderson has most kindly arranged to give her entertainment in aid of the fund for the Christmas parcels.” No doubt this recital took place in the Village Room.



The magazine reported in March 1919 that an executive committee had been formed to decide on the form that a memorial to the fallen should take. Henry Henderson was appointed Treasurer but he had to be away from England for some months so it was unanimously resolved that his daughter, Miss Violet Henderson, act as Treasurer in his absence. In April 1919 she wrote a letter to the Parish Magazine regretting that the money was not coming in quite as well as might be expected and she appealed for contributions from everyone, however small. In November 1920 it was reported that Mrs Carnegie (better known as Miss Violet Henderson) had been invited to perform the act of unveiling the War Memorial on Sunday 21 December at 2:30.

Violet's marriage on 8 November 1919 in St Lawrence Church to Captain Carnegie DSO. MC. was a grand affair. The village magazine reported

that it attracted more than usual enthusiasm and interest and every opportunity was taken of assuring her of the affection and good wishes of the inhabitants of the parish. The service was conducted by the vicar and there was an address by the Lord Bishop of Worcester. Amongst the numerous presents were several handsomely bound volumes of poems given by the people of Bedmond and a framed engraving and a shell-case gong given by the ex-servicemen of the parish, who after the service dragged the bride's car as far as Cecil Lodge.

Elvira Maude Henderson

Elvira Maude, the second daughter of Elvira and Henry Henderson, married Edward Wynne Chapman on 16 July 1912. A celebration arch and flags adorned Bedmond High Street on the occasion of their marriage with the message “Long Life and Happiness”. Sadly, it was not to be.

His death was recorded in the Abbots Langley Parish Magazine in December 1914 “Lieutenant Edward Wynne Chapman was killed in action at Ypres. A little over two years ago we were sincerely offering him our congratulations and good wishes on his marriage to Miss Maude Henderson - now Mrs Chapman may feel assured that she



has the prayers and sympathy of all of us. May they rest in peace and may light perpetually shine upon them.”

A tribute was placed in the New Zealand Hertford Journal (his place of origin). “During his stay in this neighbourhood he had endeared himself to all who met him. He was of a particularly lovable disposition, and altogether a most attractive personality. Tall, handsome, straightforward in speech and behaviour, a fearless cross-country rider and distinguished in all military sports. He fell fighting on November 17th, and his name and those of two other officers were sent to Headquarters for conspicuous bravery. Lieutenant Chapman was buried in Ypres cemetery side by side with two officers of his regiment. The burial was conducted amidst most impressive surroundings - English and German guns firing without cessation, and shells falling within a few hundred yards - a truly glorious end for a soldier.”



The Abbots Langley Parish Magazine of July 1916 added “We are glad and count it an honour to have in the Church the beautiful little brass which has been erected to the memory of Lieutenant Edward Wynne Chapman. The inscription is as follows ‘In loving memory of Edward Wynne Chapman, Lieut. 3rd (Prince of Wales) Dragoon Guards, died of wounds received in action at Ypres, November 17th, 1914, aged 27. Erected by his wife’.”

Edward is commemorated on the Abbots Langley and Bedmond war memorials and is also included on the war memorial of Netherton Church, Glenshee, where the Henderson family owned a holiday home.

Aline Henderson

The eldest daughter, Aline (named after Elvira’s mother) moved away from the village before the First World War and did not feature in any local news. In 1911 she married John Tyson Wigan, a hop merchant and Major in the Berkshire Yeomanry, later to become Brigadier General and Member of Parliament for Abingdon.

She and her husband had a very close relationship with her grandmother Aline and step grandfather Sir Joseph White Todd throughout their lives and there are reports in *The Scotsman* of John Wigan attending shooting parties on the grouse moors of Sir Joseph’s Morenish estate. On Sir Joseph’s death in 1926, Aline was a substantial beneficiary, inheriting one quarter of his residual estate, worth over £2 million in today’s money.



Ronald Henry White Henderson

Alongside the new Breakspear Room at the rear of St Lawrence Church, hidden in the long grass and rubbing shoulders with a drainpipe is the unprepossessing grave of Major Ronald Henry White Henderson, 1st Royal Dragoon Guards. Close by is the elaborate tomb of his mother, Elvira Henderson.

Nearby in Hemel Hempstead lived Sebastian Henry Garrard and his family. The 1901 census records them as resident in a Georgian mansion called The Lockers, on Bury Hill, close to Lockers Park Preparatory School. Sebastian was the principal of Garrard & Co, jewellers of Mayfair and he lived in Hemel Hempstead with his wife Eleanor and two daughters, Bella and Marjorie, together with their household staff comprising a footman, cook, scullery maid, nurse, groom and three housemaids. By 1911 Sebastian and Eleanor had six daughters and the family had moved to Welton Place in Daventry with an increased household staff of fourteen.



We do not know whether Ronald Henry White Henderson met Marjorie May Garrard before or after the move to Daventry, but they formed a relationship and married at Holy Trinity Church, Brompton on 1 February 1917. By then, Ronald was a Lieutenant in the 1st Royal Dragoon Guards and had served with his regiment in Flanders where he was wounded. After the war, he was initiated as a Freemason on 8 December 1921 in the Foxhunters Lodge.

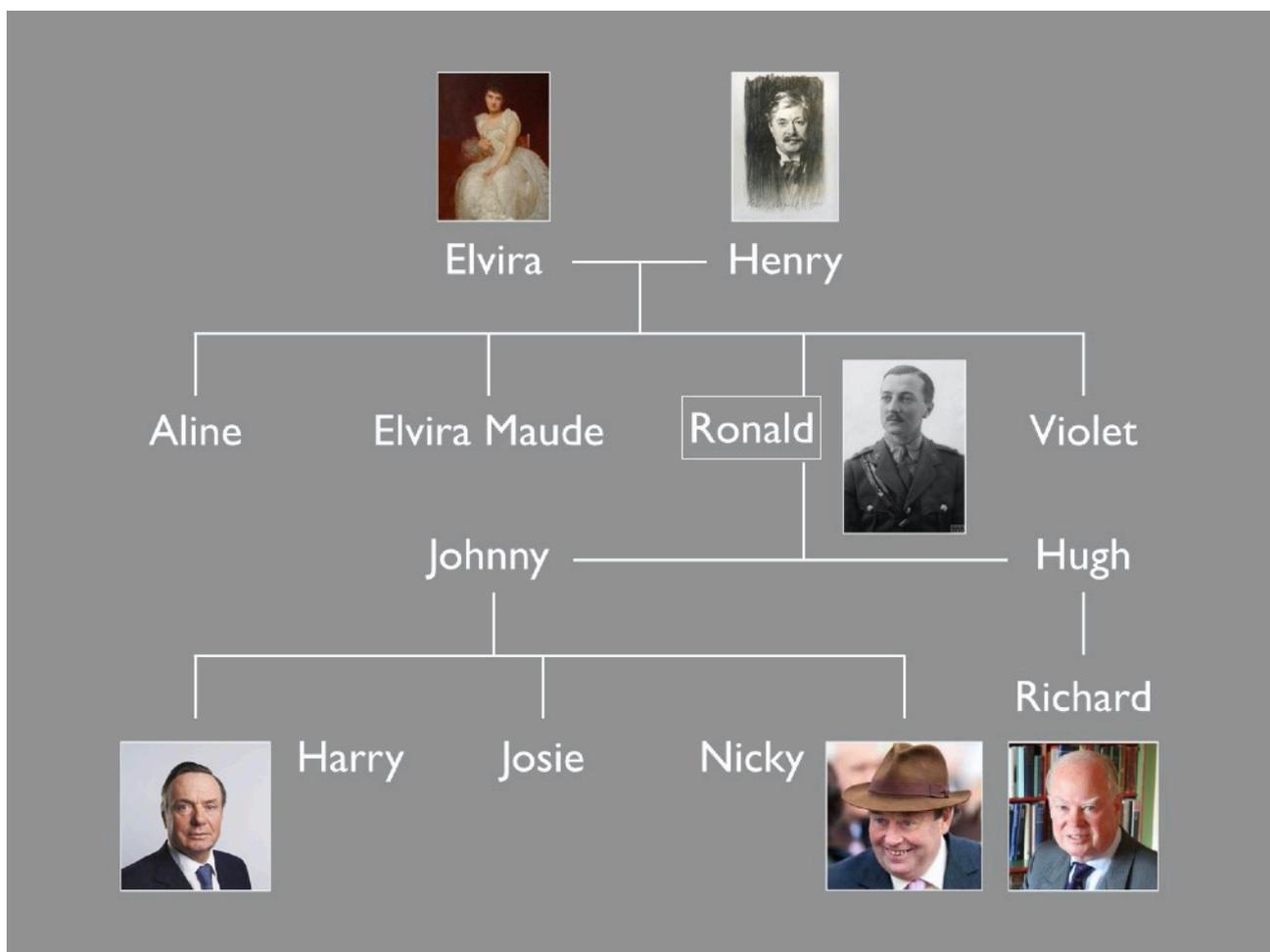
Between 1918 and 1923, Ronald and Marjorie had three children. Hugh Chetwode was born in 1923 and died in 1993, John Ronald (known as Johnny) was born in 1920 and died in 2003 and Elvira was born in 1923 and died in infancy. The marriage to Marjorie was short lived and Ronald abandoned his wife and children within a few years. They divorced in 1928 and the two boys were brought up by their mother.

Ronald's final years were spent in an apartment at 5 Iverna Gardens, Kensington and he died at the age of 63 in Middlesex Hospital, St Marylebone. He never made contact with his children after the divorce and he never met any of his grandchildren. His estate valued at £3,818 14s. 2d. was left to Alice Lovelock, a spinster.

Ronald's will is dated 7 April 1943 in which he bequeathed all of his property to Alice Lovelock living at the same address. There are no instructions about funeral arrangements. Alice arranged for the body to be transported to Abbots Langley for burial and subsequently registered the will for probate in a shaky hand on 8 May 1956.

The Parish Magazine for March 1956 contains his obituary as follows "The death of a good friend. The death of Major Ronald Henderson on 10 February in the Middlesex Hospital in London has removed from us a distinguished friend of this parish. The name of Henderson is an illustrious one in this parish. Major Ronald's father gave the Henderson Memorial Hall to the church for the parish in memory of his wife (who died an early death), and to her memory erected a fine tomb by the west door of the church, sculpted by Sir George Frampton, who also made the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens."

Henry and Elvira's Family Tree



Elvira's Memorials

Our village hall was conceived as a practical solution to a problem. It was first mooted in 1887 by Howard Gilliatt as a project to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria but insufficient funds were raised. Various attempts were made over the following

15 years to raise money to build a village room but nothing materialised and in desperation the vicar proposed a corrugated iron shed as a make-do solution.

Following Elvira's death in 1901, Henry William Henderson agreed to underwrite the cost of constructing the village room. There was a passing reference to Elvira in the report on progress in June 1902 but by December when the hall was completed, her name was no longer associated with the project except in the wording of a small memorial plaque.

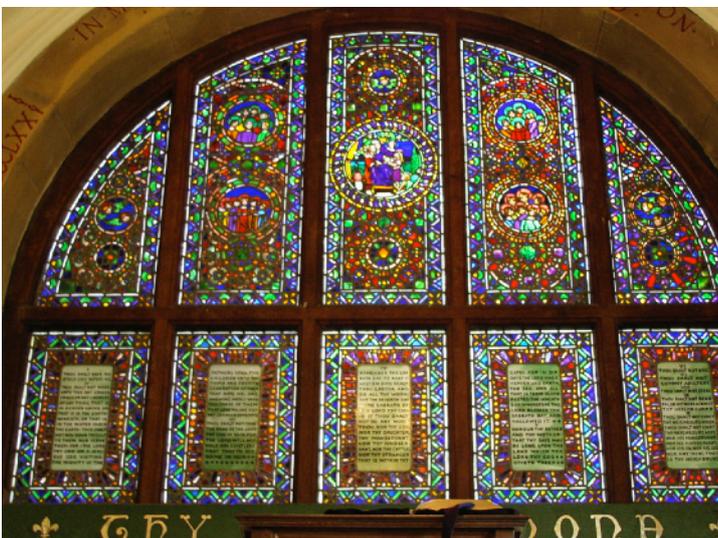
On the other hand, the chapel in Morenish was conceived from the outset as a memorial to Elvira. It was located in countryside that she loved, the detailing was immaculate and the installation of a Tiffany window commissioned at a cost of £1,300 was extravagant. In Abbots Langley, a lavish tomb in Art Nouveau style designed by Sir George Frampton, the same sculptor who created the statue of Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens, was constructed over Elvira's remains in St Lawrence Churchyard.

Ten years later an exquisite window in Elvira's memory was installed in the north aisle of St Lawrence Church on 13 July 1912 by her mother Aline. A nearby brass plaque reads "To the glory of God and in memory of Elvira Henderson, the window above the alter in this Chapel of the Holy Name is dedicated by her mother Aline Todd."



Fake or Fortune

The window in the Morenish Memorial Chapel was removed by the Church of Scotland and is in the hands of conservator Christian Shaw based in Edinburgh, the intention being to restore it for eventual display in the church of Killin and Ardeonaig, about five miles west of Morenish. Historic Environment Scotland in their listing citation state "The coloured glass window by Tiffany Studios of New York was removed in June 2015. Aline would likely have been aware of American trends in art and architecture at the turn of the 20th century which may have influenced the commission of the Morenish Chapel, including the choice of a coloured glass window designed by Tiffany Studios."



Jennifer Thalheimer, Curator of the Morse Museum in Orlando Florida presides over one of the biggest collections of Tiffany glass in the world and in her collection there is a brochure published by Tiffany Studios in 1909 of their commissions throughout the world. Two windows are in England and three in Scotland,

including at Morenish. A fourth window was commissioned for a church in Scotland after the brochure was published making a total of six in the whole of the UK, of which five survive. This would make the Morenish window a very rare and valuable work of art.

But there is a problem. A treatise about stained glass in Scotland by Alison Robertson of the Scottish Stained Glass Symposium does not list the glass in the Morenish chapel which is surprising for a window of such importance. Furthermore, Alastair Duncan, an art dealer in New York who wrote a book in 1986 which is recognised as the world authority on Tiffany glass, has given a scathing opinion about the window. He says the palette does not resemble his standard colourations, the leading is dreadful and the signature is not authentic. He concludes that the attribution to Tiffany is bogus.

Christian Shaw who has the window in storage for eventual conservation is in no doubt that it originated from Tiffany Studios in New York, but Alastair Duncan has dismissed this out of hand. Wayne Boucher, another expert, thinks that the window is dreadful but the signature looks authentic. Alastair responded that signatures are relatively easy to replicate.

Is the Morenish memorial window a fake? Tiffany windows are much sought after and fetch large sums at auction, particularly in the Japanese market.

Compare central roundel in the Morenish memorial window with a Tiffany window which is known to be genuine, located in Linsy-Chittenden Hall at Yale University, Connecticut.



The Church of Scotland recently suspended work on renovating the window. It seems unlikely that the Morenish memorial window will ever be seen in public again.

Postscript

The research for the Henderson Legacy project was undertaken by Trevor Baker, Hon Treasurer for the Abbots Langley Local History Society. At his invitation Richard and Harry Henderson, descendants of Elvira and Henry Henderson visited Abbots Langley for the first time on 21 July 2018. They stood over their grandfather's grave with some misgivings as Ronald had deserted his family in the 1920s to spend the rest of his life with Alice Lovelock. His children Johnny and Hugh regarded him with scorn. He was

disinherited by his father Henry and had nothing to do with his family again. When his step grandfather Sir Joseph White Todd died, the largest slice of his extensive estate was inherited by the eldest granddaughter Aline, rather than the eldest grandson Ronald.



On the other hand, their great grandmother's tomb was regarded with affection. The present day family had no knowledge of Elvira and Henry's association with Abbots Langley until Trevor Baker contacted them. As well as the tomb, they viewed the memorial window in the north aisle of St Lawrence Church, the memorial plaque to Edward Wynne Chapman and his inscription on the War Memorial in the churchyard. They then attended a reception at the Henderson Memorial Hall, built by their great grandfather and previewed an exhibition being staged there displaying the results of this research. The following week, Josie Reed, great granddaughter of Elvira and Henry Henderson visited the memorials and the exhibition.



Richard Henderson with his wife Annie, Trevor Baker and Harry Henderson, 21 July 2018

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 Memorial plaque - photo: Trevor Baker
 Retractable seating - photo: Henderson HUB
- Page 2: Portrait of Lady Aline White Todd 1924 by Philip de Lazlo (1869- 1937)
 Sir Joseph White Todd - photo courtesy of John Todd of Seattle
- Page 3: Elvira de Orihuela - portrait circa 1890 by an unknown artist
 Henry William Henderson 1918 by John Singer Sargent (1856-1925)
- Page 4: Elvira Henderson and her children 1901 - photo courtesy of John Todd
 Elvira's tomb - photo: Mike Quinton
- Page 5: Henderson Memorial Hall - photo: Wendy Ash
- Page 6: Morenish Chapel 1902 - photo courtesy of Rev John Lincoln
- Page 7: Morenish Chapel 1910 - photo courtesy of John Todd
 Violet Henderson - photo courtesy of John Todd
- Page 8: War Memorial - photo: Trevor Baker
 Bedmond High Street 1912 - photo: parish archive
- Page 9: Memorial plaque St Lawrence Church - photo: Trevor Baker
 Portrait of Aline Henderson 1911 by James Jebusa Shannon (1862-1923)
- Page 10: Ronald Henry White Henderson's grave - photo: Trevor Baker
 Ronald Henry White Henderson - photo: Imperial War Museum
- Page 12: North aisle, St Lawrence Church - photo: Trevor Baker
 Morenish memorial window - photo courtesy of Rev John Lincoln
- Page 13: Morenish memorial window - photo courtesy of Rev John Lincoln
 Linsly-Chittenden Hall window - from Wikimedia Commons
- Page 14: St Lawrence churchyard photos: Mike Quinton

Acknowledgements and Attributions

Sources of information are quoted in the text. Quotes from newspapers and magazines were sourced from the Watford Public Library, the British Newspaper Archive and St Lawrence Church office. We would like to acknowledge the contribution of many people who supported the research including: John Todd Jr of Seattle, Iain Anthony Macleod, Rev John Lincoln, Pam Rastall, Richard Henderson, Harry Henderson, Josie Reed, Simon & Wendy Ash at the Henderson HUB, John Noonan, Mike Quinton, Roger Yapp and the Imperial War Museum. We would also like to acknowledge the support of Abbots Langley Parish Council who provided a grant towards the cost of mounting the Henderson Legacy exhibition in the Henderson HUB between 23 July and 1 August 2018.

Trevor Baker
 Hon Treasurer
 Abbots Langley Local History Society

1 September 2020

