

THE PITT FAMILY IN BARTON STACEY, HAMPSHIRE FROM 1892, AND THE FIRM OF CHARLES PITT, WHEELWRIGHT, LATER CALLED PITT TRAILERS

**by Linda Moffatt ©2013
for the Barton Stacey History Group**

If you are able to amend or add any more information to this account, please contact the

*Barton Stacey History Group at bartonstaceyhistory@gmail.com
www.bartonstaceyhistory.co.uk*

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L. Moffatt

The firm which became known as Pitt Trailers was established around 1892 in Barton Stacey by wheelwright Charles Pitt. Its history reflects that of many companies in the 20th century, of moving successfully from the traditional methods of manufacture to more mechanised production methods, of take-overs by larger concerns in order to expand and survive, and of eventual closure in the 1970s.

I would like to acknowledge the information on the family received from Anne Kunz (née Pitt) granddaughter of Charles Pitt, and that from Peggy Carter who is cousin to Anne and daughter of Reginald Riggs the brother of Charles Pitt's daughter-in-law .

The Pitt family sold its interest in Pitt Trailers around 1960 but continued to trade as Pitt Trailers and to employ the existing workforce. I am grateful for information on this stage of the firm's history to Dennis Smith, an employee and a lifelong resident of Barton Stacey. We would welcome memories of other former employees to add to this account.

CHARLES PITT was born in 1855 in Pitton, Wiltshire, eldest child of George Pitt, a carpenter of Pitton Green, and his wife Sarah Ann (Parsons) and learned the carpentry trade under his father. Indeed, there were other Pitt families in Pitton who were wheelwrights and carpenters¹.

In 1892 Charles Pitt married Rhoda Elizabeth Gilbert. She was born in Clatford, Hampshire, in 1869, daughter of William Gilbert and his wife Mary (née Prater). Mr Gilbert was a threshing machine proprietor who had moved in the early-mid 1880s from Longparish to Bransbury Mill

¹ Walter Pitt of Pitton and his sons were coach builders and wheelwrights with a business in Abbots Ann, Hampshire from about 1880.

House. Charles Pitt died in 1922 aged 67, his widow in 1931 aged 61. They are buried together, and alongside their son Horace and his wife Beatrice, in Barton Stacey churchyard.

Charles Pitt established his premises around the time of his marriage, occupying a site in Barton Stacey village opposite the church and between Barton Stacey school and the Post Office. The family lived in the house called West View.

Children of Charles and Rhoda Elizabeth (Gilbert) Pitt, born in Barton Stacey,

- i. Beatrice Sarah Annie, born 1893.
- ii. Frederick William, born 5 September 1895. He enlisted on 4 May 1917 with the Royal Naval Air Service (228927 Aircraftman 3). He was a rigger and carpenter of aircraft for the remainder of the war.
- iii. Hilda Julia, born 1897, died 1898.
- iv. **HORACE CHARLES**, born 1899. He married Beatrice Mary Riggs in 1931.
- v. Daisy Rhoda, born 1902. She married Arthur H. Blake in 1932.
- vi. Grace Florence, born 1905. She married Wilfred J. Vidler in 1927.
- vii. May Nellie, born 1909. She married Jonathan R. Barstow in 1932.



Frederick William Pitt

Charles Pitt was a manufacturer of various types of horse-drawn agricultural trailers. We cannot be sure why he chose to settle in Barton Stacey village, perhaps the availability of a suitable plot of land for his workshop and yard or perhaps the opportunity to purchase West View. He does not appear to have employed an existing workforce. At the time of the 1891 census there was one business in the parish which employed carpenters and wheelwrights, that of Walter Farley (1834-1925) who was a son of John Farley, carpenter and wheelwright from Wiley, Wiltshire, and his wife Charlotte. The Farleys lived from the 1840s adjacent to the Plough Inn and in 1856 son Walter married the innkeeper's daughter Hannah Eysers. Walter established himself as a carpenter and by 1871 described himself as a carpenter and builder employing three men. By 1891 Walter and his family lived at Yew Tree Cottage in the village and he is called a carpenter and wheelwright in this census. We can speculate that he employed the three carpenters and the three wheelwrights then living in the parish. None of these men was resident or working in the parish ten years later at the time of the census in 1901 and it appears that Charles Pitt recruited his own workforce from elsewhere. Certainly all the wheelwrights working in the parish in 1901 were newly arrived since the census of 1891.

In the 1901 census Walter Farley and his assistant carpenter Alexander Wyatt were the only men in the parish described as carpenters. Walter Farley continued in business in the village until at least 1911 but, apart from that of 1871, the censuses do not make it clear how many men he employed.

The following **residents of 1901** were perhaps in Charles Pitt's workforce:

Henry Sansom (wheelwright), born about 1878 in Folteridge, Middlesex, married to Beatrice and living in The Street. He is perhaps the Henry Charles Sansom whose death at the age of 23 was registered at Andover in the 2nd quarter of 1901.

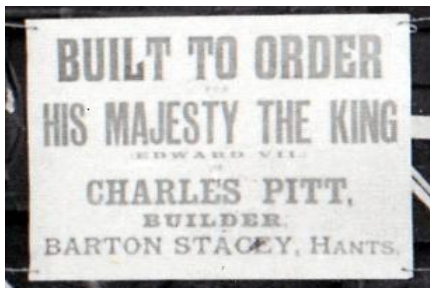
Arthur Thatcher, (wheelwright and postman, quite a combination for a 17-year old), born about 1884, boarding with the Whittick family in The Street. Married Laura Sophia Swatton from Collingbourne Ducis and remained a wheelwright in the village, at least until 1911. Two daughters known, Cassie and Ruth.

Alfred Ball (blacksmith, worker), born in Barton Stacey about 1870, married to Ida, living in The Street. By 1911 he was a farm labourer in Barton Stacey.

Sycamore Cottage is now known as the Post Office and shop. Arthur Froome was the enumerator for this census.

101. Lyncamore Cottage	1					13.	Edw. Poynter Farm.	do- do.
						54	Wesley Procter, & Supermarket	do. Grawley
						53.		do. Broughton.
						26	2nd Lpl Army Service Corps.	do. Barton Stacey
						20		do. do.
						18.	Pupil Teacher School	do. do.
						15.		do. do.
						8.		do. do.
102 Barton St.	1.					45	Builder	Hills, Pitton.
						31		Hants. Clatford.
						7		do. Barton Stacey.
						5		do. do.
						1.		do. do.
						21		do. Longparish
						17	General (Dombek)	do. W. Herwell.
All Saints Church	1							
" " School	1							

The following two photographs, kindly loaned by Peggy Carter, were taken at Charles Pitt's premises in Barton Stacey, apparently to celebrate his having been commissioned to build a trailer for Edward VII for use at Richmond Park. Charles Pitt stands on the right, with his workforce of wheelwrights and carpenters. We think that the gentleman with the wooden leg must be the Charles Hale, wheelwright of Barton Stacey, who applied for an out-pension from St Cross Hospital in 1898. He was married, his wife then living and they had three sons. 'He has lost a leg and now does odd jobs'. References were supplied by George Judd, County Councillor, Cocum, Barton Stacey and by Arthur Froome, Church Warden. If you can identify any of these men as those in the list above, please contact the Barton Stacey Parish Local History Group.



Left:

We can date the photograph to around 1903 by the ages of the children who took the opportunity to be snapped. They are Horace Pitt (born 1899) and Beatrice Pitt (born 1893).

Below:

This photograph was taken in the late 1930s at one of the many agricultural shows at which Charles Pitt exhibited, perhaps the Bath and West. The firm was the first in the south of England to build an agricultural trailer fitted with pneumatic tyred wheels - to be laughed at for their pains.



Left:

All Saints Church, Barton Stacey, can be seen in the background to this photograph, which appeared in *Country Life* magazine on 3 August 1978. Horace Pitt is on the left and Reginald Riggs his brother-in-law on the right.

Below:

Horace Pitt stands beside his car as the loading is completed by Reginald Riggs. Barton Stacey Post Office is seen with its sycamore tree in front. The sign of the Swan Inn is just in view on the roadside beyond it. The white picket fence is the front boundary of West View.



Horace Pitt outside West View, Barton Stacey. (Name of lady unknown).

The business continued to flourish under the guidance of his son Horace Pitt and the family continued to live in West View. This beautiful Grade II listed house dates from the early 1800s. It is, next to the Post Office and was used as storage by Peter Golding Ltd for many years, hidden from view by tall hedges. The picture below shows the house in June 2018 as its renovation begins after sale of the site.



Anne Pitt and her cousin Peggy Riggs in the front garden of West View, about 1943.

The white railings at the front boundary can be seen, and the wall which formed the northern boundary. The building is the old forge where horses were shod, demolished since. All Saints Church is in the background.

The company was taken over by Alexander Stephens & Sons around 1960 but continued to trade as Pitt Trailers. They continued to innovate and in 1964 introduced semi-trailers using fabricated main beams, which assisted in making variations to specifications². A new factory opened in Glasgow in 1965, and, with the extension to its existing premises at Barton Stacey, Pitt Trailers Ltd. planned to treble its production capacity. The extension to the Barton Stacey factory doubled the capacity of that plant. The Scottish factory was then producing 200 trailers a year and this figure was expected to increase to 350 units per year. Initially both factories were to produce the complete range of units made by the company, but ultimately it was planned that the Scottish factory would concentrate on the production of stock trailers of all models. Pitt Trailers Ltd. marketed its products through a national distributor network³.

On 7 March 1966 an advertisement appeared in The Glasgow Herald for a Company Secretary/Accountant for Pitt Trailers Ltd a subsidiary Company of the Alexander Stephen Group of Companies. Initial interviews were to be held at Alexander Stephen & Sons Ltd, Linthouse, Glasgow, but applications marked 'Confidential' were to be addressed to the Managing Director, Pitt Trailers Ltd, Barton Stacey, Nr. Winchester, Hants. A modern house was available to rent or assistance was offered with house purchase. This was perhaps one of the four houses on the eastern side of Gravel Lane which belonged to Pitt Trailers.

On 10 June 1966 one of the 13 patents assigned to the company was awarded for a guiding trailer for carrying shipping containers in confined spaces on a ship, railway vehicle or aircraft⁴.

In April 1969 Pitt Trailers was acquired by the Press Group of Companies. Press had its own Plant Division to ensure Press vehicles got rapid service and time and money was saved on using external contractors. Their journal published soon after⁵ describes the 'workshops that were recently acquired at Barton Stacey' which were to manufacture and repair all the trailers that the Company needed. These ranged from the small service laying trailers to large pole trailers and low loaders. Comment was made of how fortunate the Plant Division was to have available locally the skilled labour from the previous owners (Pitt Trailers).

'Work is going well there and much expansion is envisaged. Already the Depot is working on 40 vehicles for the Gas Conversion Division. The skilled teams at Abingdon and Barton Stacey are owed much by the operators and drivers who enjoy the safety and reliability of equipment maintained by the Plant Division.'

² Commercial Motor Archive, originally printed 11 December 1964.

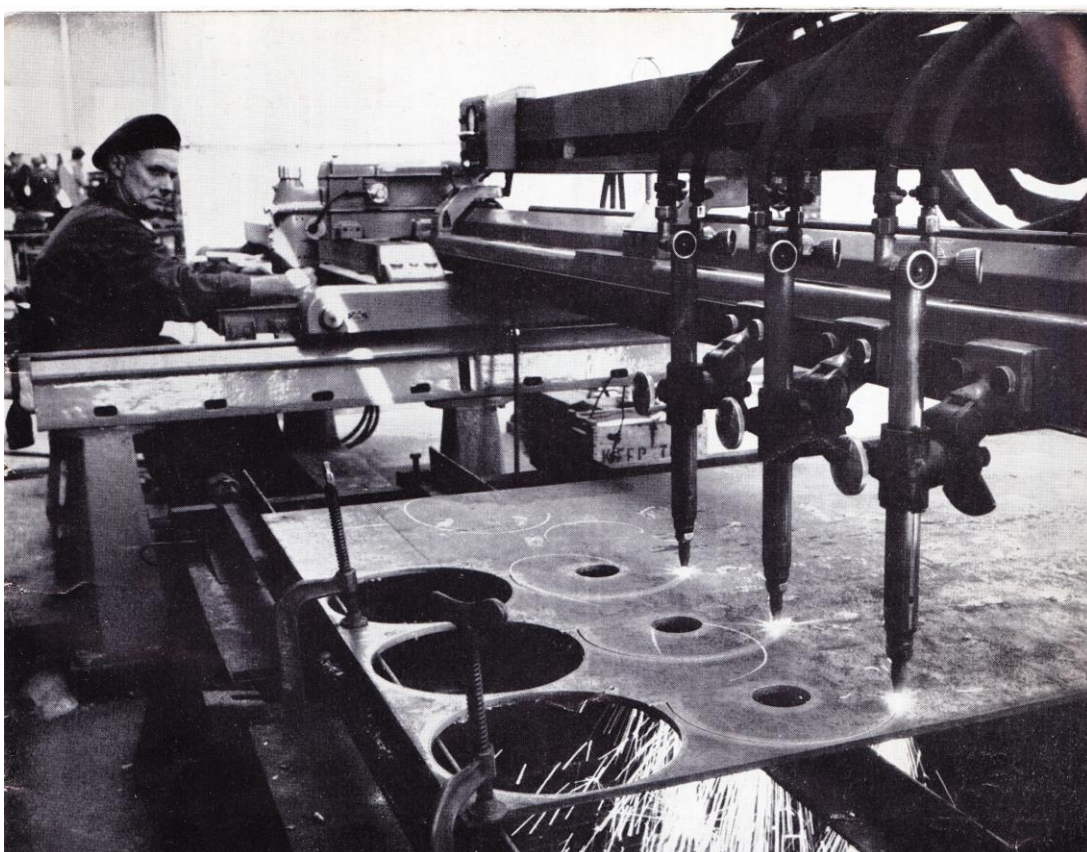
³ *ibid*, originally printed on the 15 October 1965.

⁴ United Kingdom Patent GB1075687.

⁵ Journal of William Press, 1969.



Main Workshop, Barton Stacey in 1969. Below: Bill Benning at work.



Pitt Trailers soon after became a subsidiary of the Central Wagon Group which had a factory and its administrative headquarters at Wigan in Lancashire. This factory won in 1970 an export order to Sweden for 85 trailers at a cost of £200,000. These were to be used by Wallenius Lines of Stockholm on roll-on/ roll-off car transporter operations between Britain and Scandanavia⁶.

Sadly, the company began to incur losses and in 1973 it closed.

The photograph on the next page was taken when the Barton Stacey factory was part of William Press, circa 1970. **Dennis Smith**, numbered 7 on the plan, has identified all but a few of the men in this photograph. If you can help identify the others, or you are aware of others who were absent for this photograph, or, indeed, you have memories of working there, please contact the Local History Group, bartonstaceyhistory@gmail.com

1	Frank __?__	13	Steve __?__
2	A. Swan	14	?
3	G. Burke	15	R. Smith
4	P. Bircham	16	Tom Thornton
5	R. Coward	17	Brian __?__
6	S. Peters	18	?
7	Dennis Smith	19	P. French
8	E. Tricker	20	Frank Smith
9	R. Smith	21	M. Paine
10	T. Wedge	22	R. Smith
11	A. Miller	23	T. Stevens
12	T. Widdit	24	J. Smith

⁶ ibid, originally printed 25 September 1970.

