



# John's House

“Houses on the West Hill, St Leonards were home to a water inspector, a superintendent of mechanical filters, ladies living on private means, governesses, and jewellers.”



**census**  
2021

## Hastings Census Project March 2021 – My Place Through Time

### The Story of 3 houses in West Hill Road, St Leonards on Sea in the 1901 and 1911 Census

#### a) Background

50 West Hill Road is the first house in a row of Victorian Houses at the crown of West Hill

Road, next to a long disused Victorian reservoir and a small cottage (No. 48), which is now

derelict. Nos. 50 – 56 were the first houses constructed next to the reservoir in 1891/92, with

the remaining houses in the row being built over the following few years. It is my understanding that Nos. 50 -56 were built by the same contractor, as they are identical, see illustration A below.

Note: The plans for the Planning applications for Nos. 50-56 are held at 'The Keep' in Brighton and once I have a chance to view them, post lockdown, I should be able to confirm this.



*Extract from Google Earth showing West Hill Reservoir and 50 -56 West Hill Road*

West Hill Road was part of the estate owned by James Burton and his family, who had purchased much of the land in St. Leonards from the Eversfield Estate, which had owned the land in St. Leonards since Norman times. James Burton and his son, the famous Architect, Decimus Burton, developed St. Leonards on Sea as a seaside resort, separate from Hastings, in the early 19th century. In the case of West Hill Road, initially a small number of houses were constructed at the start of West Hill Road between 1828 and 1838 in front of the Archery Ground, most of which are still existing today. This can be seen on the Plan of the Burton's estate from 1846, shown in illustration B below, which shows the estate that had been developed by 1846 and in pink the land that was still to be developed. It can be seen from the map, that the remainder of West Hill Road was still open countryside.

Another development during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the purchase of a portion of the Burton land in West Hill Road to Hastings Corporation in order to build a water reservoir and pumping station. This was opened in 1861 and the site also contained a newly built small cottage for the pump master, which is now No. 48 West Hill Road, but has sadly been empty for nearly 20 years and is falling into rack and ruin. It can be seen in plan at Illustration A above.

*Plan showing the Burton property still to be developed in Pink*

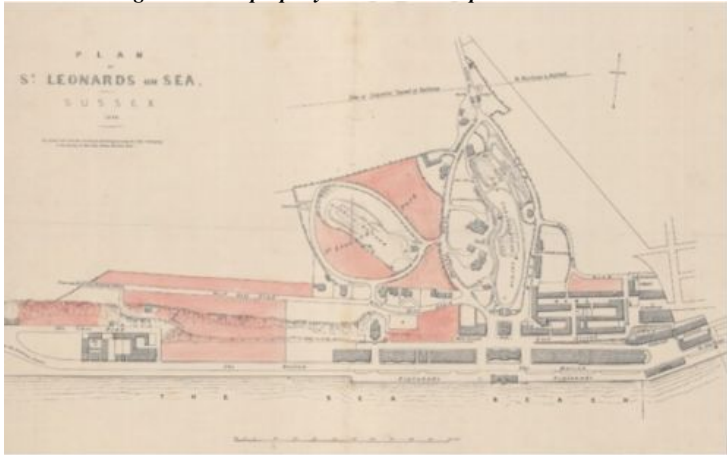


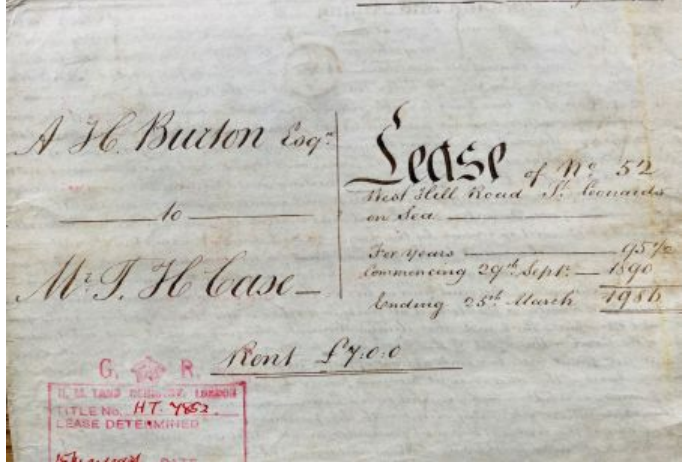
Figure 6: Plan of the Burtons' estate at St Leonards in 1846 (HMAG ref 1903.2.15)

Further westwards down the road, there were a number of further large developments taking place in the early 1880s, with the construction of Eversfield Chest Hospital, the Convalescent home of Chelsea (now Senlac House and divided into private residences), Gambier House and a Children's Home at Malmesbury House (now demolished).

In 1891 the grandson of James Burton, Alfred Henry Burton, was now the legal owner of the land west of the reservoir along the northside of West Hill Road and on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1891, he entered into a leasehold agreement for the plot of No. 52 West Hill Road for 95½ years commencing on the 29<sup>th</sup> September 1890 with a Thomas Henry Case for a Rent of £7 per annum, with the proviso that Thomas Case would develop the land for housing. In 1891 Thomas Case was living in London Road and his profession was stated as being a Private Estate Agent. It is likely that this development was a private transaction on behalf of his family, as we shall see shortly.

A further extract from the Lease document below shows the plan for the proposed house referred to in the lease document. There are 2 things that should be noted below, one is the actual house numbering. In the 1891 census, the cottage on the reservoir was numbered 35

*Extract from Original Lease Document of 1891*



and as a result of numerous developments along the road, the number of the proposed house was estimated to be No. 52. By the 1901 census the road numbering had been finalized by Hastings Council with the reservoir cottage being numbered at 48 and therefore nos. 52 onwards were renumbered Nos. 50 onwards.

**(See Attachment 1 – 1901 Census details for 48 to 52 West Hill Road).**

The second thing to note is that both the land for proposed house at No.52 (later renumbered 50) and for No. 54 (later renumbered No.52) were to be leased to Mr. Thomas Case.

All the houses in the street are now Freehold and in the case of No. 50 the freehold of the property was purchased from the Burton Estate in 1924.

*Extract from Original Lease Document of 1891 showing proposed plans*



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## b) History of No. 48, West Hill Road

In the 1901 Census (**see Attachment 1**) Four people were living in the Pump Master's cottage at No. 48, a Thomas Eldridge and his family, consisting of Thomas (age 49), his wife Mary (age 54), son Thomas (age 18) and an uncle age 70. Thomas occupation was listed as a Water Inspector and it is assumed that he was employed by Hastings Corporation Water Board to oversee the reservoir and that they had supplied the cottage for him and his family.

### Extract from 1901 Census

Thos Eldridge	Head	M	49	Water Inspector	Worker	-	-
Mary W. D <sup>o</sup>	Wife	M	54			-	-
Thos W. D <sup>o</sup>	Son	M	18	Jeweller's work	Worker	-	-
Thos. D <sup>o</sup>	Uncle	M	70	Living on own		-	Ball

It transpires that Thomas Eldridge was a long-term employee of the Water Board. In the 1881 Census, at the age of 29 Thomas was living with his family and employed as a Local Board Labourer, as was his father and his brother.

### Extract from 1881 Census

Walter Eldridge	Head	Mar	54	Local Board Labourer	"	Ball
Mary "	Wife	"	54		"	"
Stephen "	Son	Unm	24	Local Board Labourer	"	St Leonard's
Thomas "	Head	Mar	29	" " "	"	"
Mary W. "	Wife	"	34		"	Hastings

By 1891 Thomas was employed at the reservoir in No.48 (which was then numbered 35) as a Water Inspector, so Thomas and his family had lived in the cottage at least 10 years by 1901. Thomas has obviously done well for himself rising from a labourer to a responsible position at the West Hill reservoir.

**Extract from 1891 Census**

Thomas Aldridge	Head	A.	X	Water Inspector	X	35	Hastings
Mary A. D.	Wife	A.	X			35	35
Thomas W. D.	Son		X	Labourer		35	35
David Kellogg	Labourer	L.	X	Water Collector	X	35	35

After 1901 the trail goes cold, as by 1911 Thomas and his family were no longer in the cottage and I have not been able to trace his whereabouts in 1911, so further investigation is needed. If he was still living, he would have been 59 years of age in 1911.

## b) History of No. 48, West Hill Road

In the 1901 Census (**see Attachment 1**) Four people were living in the Pump Master's cottage at No. 48, a Thomas Eldridge and his family, consisting of Thomas (age 49), his wife Mary (age 54), son Thomas (age 18) and an uncle age 70. Thomas occupation was listed as a Water Inspector and it is assumed that he was employed by Hastings Corporation Water Board to oversee the reservoir and that they had supplied the cottage for him and his family.

### **Extract from 1901 Census**

Thos Eldridge	Head	M	49	Water Inspector	Worker	-	-	Battle
Mary W. D <sup>o</sup>	Wife	M	54			-	-	Battle
Thos W. D <sup>o</sup>	Son	M	18	Jewellers assistant	Worker	-	-	Battle
Thos. D <sup>o</sup>	Uncle	M	70	Living on pension		-	-	

It transpires that Thomas Eldridge was a long-term employee of the Water Board. In the 1881 Census, at the age of 29 Thomas was living with his family and employed as a Local Board Labourer, as was his father and his brother.

### **Extract from 1881 Census**

Walter Eldridge	Head	Man	59	Local Board Labourer	"	Battle
Mary "	Wife	"	59		"	"
Stephen "	Son	Man	24	Local Board Labourer	"	H. Leonard's
Thomas "	Head	Man	29	" " "	"	"
Mary W. "	Wife	"	34		"	Hastings



By 1891 Thomas was employed at the reservoir in No.48 (which was then numbered 35) as a Water Inspector, so Thomas and his family had lived in the cottage at least 10 years by 1901. Thomas has obviously done well for himself rising from a labourer to a responsible position at the West Hill reservoir.

*Extract from 1891 Census*

Thomas Aldridge	Head	A.	X	Water Inspector	X	35	35
Mary A. D.	Wife	B.	X			35	35
Thomas W. D.	Son		X	School		35	35
David Robinson	Labourer	L.	X	Water Postman	X	35	35

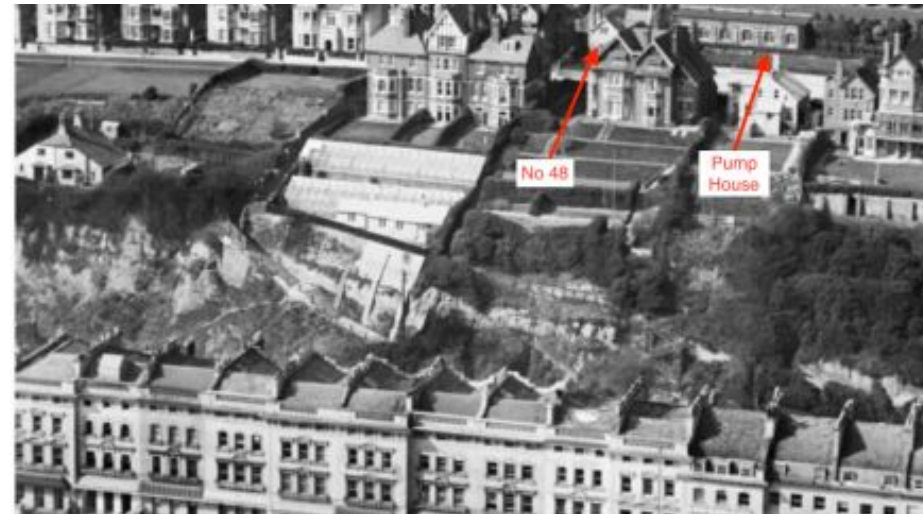
After 1901 the trail goes cold, as by 1911 Thomas and his family were no longer in the cottage and I have not been able to trace his whereabouts in 1911, so further investigation is needed. If he was still living, he would have been 59 years of age in 1911.

By 1911 (**see Attachment 2**), Thomas Eldridge's place had been taken by another municipal worker William Fuge (age 43), his wife Francis (age 44) their 2 sons William and Sidney, aged 16 and 15 respectively. William's occupation was slightly different to that of Thomas, being designated Superintendent of Mechanical Filters. I'm not an Engineer and this title sound very grand, but it may well be he was carrying out the same function as Thomas Eldridge and was in charge of the Pump House. More investigation could be carried out in this respect.

As to the reservoir, it last supplied water in 1927 and would probably have closed for good soon after that. Apparently, for a brief period of time, it was used as a reserve for fire-fighting during the Second World War, which would make an interesting story in its own right.

The aerial photograph below shows No. 48 and the reservoir next to the pump house, which has now been demolished. The date of the photograph is unknown, but there is a clue in the greenhouses in front of 67 and 69, which was a thriving market garden in 1920 and 1930s, so it is possible it dates from that time. Unfortunately, in the photograph Nos. 50 to 56 are hidden behind the houses in front, but the rest of Victorian terrace can just be seen in the top left of the picture.

**Aerial Photograph of West Hill Road, showing Pump House (1920s/30s?)**



Sadly, time has not been kind to No. 48, it has been empty for over 20 years and is owned by a Developer that also owns the reservoir site. There have been a number of efforts to get Hastings Council to make a Compulsory purchase of the house, in order for it to be sold and sympathetically restored as habitable accommodation, but to no avail. It is probably time to have another campaign in this regard and I will be writing to the Council to find out the current status in this regard. Watch this space! The present sorry state of the cottage can be seen in the photograph below :-

**48 West Hill Road in 2021**



**View of the Cottage and Reservoir site**



### c) History of No. 50 (previously No.52)

In the 1901 Census No. 50 was listed as uninhabited (**see Attachment 1**). The reason for this is unknown, but as the leasehold on the house was still owned by Thomas Case, it could be that the house was between tenants. It is likely that we will never know the reason for this. It is a shame that very little is known on the history of the house between its construction in 1891/92 and 1911

However, by 1911, the house was occupied by a Widower, Edmund Parker (age 75) together with his one single daughter (age 38) and a domestic servant Florence Manser (age 19). Both Edmund and his daughter were stated as living off private means (**See Attachment 3**)

Extract from 1911 Census

1	Edmund Parker	Head	75	Widower	<del>4</del> <del>2</del> <del>2</del>	Ret any (private means)
2	Ann Lillian Parker	Daughter	38	Single		20 (30)
3						
4	Florence Inez Manser	Servant	19	Single		General Servant (domestic)
5						

Edmund Parker was obviously used to living a life of leisure, because as far back as 1871, 40 years earlier, he was living in Hampstead, London, living off the Interest of Money and Houses. To be in that position at the early age of 35, where he did not need to work, with a family and 2 servants, which suggests that he must have inherited some property from his family. However, it should be noted that his Mother-in-Law was also living in the house and her profession was listed as 'Houses', so there is the intriguing possibility that Edmund was living off his wife's income.

Extract from 1871 Census

107 Alexandra St	1	Edmund Parker	Head	35	35	Interest of Money & Houses
		Mary J Parker	Wife	30	30	Houses
		Lucy J Platt	Servant	14	14	
		Charlotte T Parker	Daughter	11	11	
		Robert Powell	Servant	22	22	General Serv
		Mary H Rose	Servant	15	15	Servant Domestic Serv

In the 1901 Census, Edmund was also living in another address in Hampstead, again living off private means. His whole life seems to have been spent in indolence and whether he made any positive contribution to society is open to question.

#### d) Inhabitants of No. 52

In 1901 there were a total of 8 residents staying in No. 52, Eliza Case (age 46) the head of the household and her sister Louise Case (age 41), their brother Samuel Case (age 39) and his three children Vyvyan (age 12), Cecily (age 10) and Jack (age 5). In addition, there were 2 non-family members, Rose and Marguerite Neuschwander (ages 12 and 9 respectively). **(See Attachment 1)**

Extract from 1901 Census

Eliza Case	Head	5	46	Governess at home	Cambridge	
Louise Case	Sister	5	41	Governess at home	London Lambeth	
Vyvyan Case	Nephew	5	12		London Lambeth	
Cecily Case	Niece	5	10		London Lambeth	
Jack Case	Nephew	5	5		London Lambeth	
Rose Neuschwander	Pupil	5	12		London Lambeth	
Marguerite Neuschwander	Pupil	5	9		London Lambeth	
Samuel Case	Widower	5	39		London Lambeth	

Eliza Case was the daughter of Thomas Case, the owner of the leasehold to Nos. 50 and 52 and in the 1881 census living at home with her parents, her occupation was listed as Schoolteacher. In this census, both her and Louise are listed as self-employed Governess at home. It is apparent that Eliza and Louise are teaching both her brother's children plus the Neuschwanders.

A Governess was a very common profession in Victorian times, employed to teach children in a private household. The difference here appears to be that they are in their own accommodation, teaching their brother's children plus 2 other children that might or might not have been living there permanently.

Eliza and Louise were both unmarried and Samuel, their brother, was listed as a Widower, which perhaps gives a clue as to why he was living in the house with his children. In the 1891 Census Samuel was living with his wife Ada in Wallington; in the 5 years since their son Jack was born in 1896, Ada must have died and here is a good example of how families helped each other out in Victorian Times.

# Extract from 1891 Census for Samuel Case

By 1911, Samuel had landed on his feet and had married again to someone 18 years his junior and in addition had 2 further children in his new marriage. He was now living in Coventry and had a good position as a District Manager for a life insurance company.

Extract from 1891 Census for Samuel Case

Samuel Case	Head	M.	29	Auctioneer	X	Coventry	Coventry
Ada Case	Wife	M.	20			Warrington	Warrington
Frederic A. do	Son		2			Warrington	Warrington
Emily A. do	Daughter		1			do	do

By 1911, Samuel had landed on his feet and had married again to someone 18 years his junior and in addition had 2 further children in his new marriage. He was now living in Coventry and had a good position as a District Manager for a life insurance company.

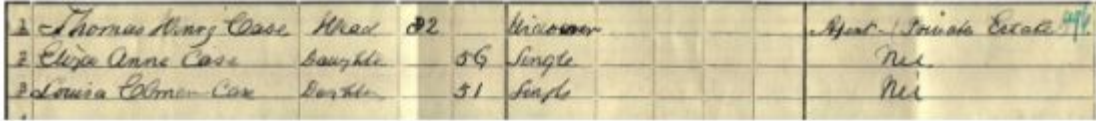
Extract from 1911 Census for Samuel Case

Case Samuel	Head	48	single					District Manager Insurance Co. Life Insurance
Case Ellen C.	Wife	30	married	10	2	2		Housewife home
Case Emily E.	Daughter	20	single					Housewife home
Case Reginald J.	Son	15	single					Scholar 390
Case Vera J.	Daughter	5						
Case Frederick W.	Daughter	3						

One further note of interest is that the census shows that they had been married 10 years, which means that it is likely that shortly after the 1901 census, Samuel and his family would have moved from No. 52 West Hill Road.

By 1911, Eliza and Louise had also moved and were sharing a house with their father Thomas, aged 82 and now a Widower, at No.10, West Hill Road down the bottom of the hill and Eastern end of the road, which unfortunately no longer exists. His occupation was listed as Agent/Private Estate and there was no profession listed against Eliza and Louise, their teaching days appear to be over.

Extract from 1911 Census for Eliza Case



1	Thomas Henry Case	Head	82	Widower			Agent - Private Estate
2	Eliza Anne Case	Daughter	56	Single			Nil
3	Louisa Elmore Case	Daughter	51	Single			Nil

But who were the Neuschwanders? Neuschwander is a rare name even today and seems to be almost exclusively of Swiss origin. In my research, I discovered that in 1901 a Victor Neuschwander (age 13) was a pupil in a boy's boarding school in Ellensea Road, called St. Leonards Collegiate School and run by a Mr. Henry King. The school appeared to house around 30 pupils (See Attachment 4). It seems too much of a coincidence that there would be another pupil called Neuschwander living in St. Leonards at that time and therefore I think that it is very likely that he was the brother of Rose and Margeurite above.

In 1901, it would have taken a family of some financial means to be able to pay for the private education of 3 children. As the children were all stated to have been born in London, I searched the 1891 and 1901 Censuses in the London area and this has resulted in Edward Neuschwander, a Swiss National, as the most likely candidate as the parent along with his English wife Mary. Edward was the Manager of the famous Charing Cross Hotel, above Charing Cross Station, in the Strand and the family was also shown in both Censuses as living in the hotel itself. Neuschwander was obviously a man of connections as he was a close friend of the celebrated French chef Escoffier and of Cesar Ritz, another Swiss exile, who went on to open the chain of Ritz hotels.

The ages of the children in the 1891 Census are consistent with Rose and Victor (Marguerite not having been born in 1891), but because the 1891 census only had the initials of the children (which are almost illegible), it is difficult to make a definitive connection.

The story is intriguing, but further research is required to establish that there is a definitive connection between the children living in No. 52 and the Manager of a famous London Hotel.

As stated above, by 1911, Eliza Case had moved out and No.52 was now inhabited by a Percy Benham (age 52), his wife Caroline (age 27), an 11 months old son Ronald and two servants Mary Shiels (age 59) employed as a Cook and Blanche Adams (age 19) employed as a Nurse (See Attachment 5)

**Extract from 1911 Census for Percy Benham**

1	Percy Benham	Head	53	Married	26			Managing Director	Ironworks	Employer
2	Caroline Amy Benham	Wife	27	Married	3	1	1			
3	Ronald Lucas Benham	Son	Months							
4	Mary Shiels	Servant	59	Single				Cook	(domestic)	6
5	Blanche Adams	Servant	19	Single				Nurse	(domestic)	8

Percy Benham's occupation was stated as being a Managing Director of an Ironworks and an Engineer. He had been married for only 3 years, which meant that he had married his 24 year old bride in his 50th year a massive 26 year difference in ages.

At this stage not much more is known about this family and further research would be needed.



e) Story of No.56 in 1911

This review was meant to cover houses 48 to 52 only, but I discovered a fascinating story of a family living in No.56 in 1911, that I felt was worth recording and sharing. In 1911 a Herbert Charles Lambert (age 59) was living at No.56 with his wife Catherine (age 60), 3 daughters and 2 servants (a cook and a housemaid) (See Attachment 6)

**Extract from 1911 Census for Herbert Charles Lambert**

A handwritten 1911 census form for Herbert Charles Lambert and his family. The form is a grid with columns for name, age, sex, marital status, and occupation. The entries are as follows:

Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation
Herbert Charles Lambert Head	59	M	Married	Gold Silversmith, Jeweller, Shopkeeper, Own
Catherine Annie Lambert Wife	60	F	Married	
Mabel Annie Lambert Daughter	33	F	Single	
Hilda May Lambert Daughter	32	F	Single	
Winifred Ada Lambert Daughter	26	F	Single	
Sarah Jane Melton Servant	45	F	Single	Cook (Domestic)
Ethel Mary Reeves Servant	29	F	Single	Housemaid (Domestic)

Herbert Charles Lambert's profession was stated as a Gold and Silversmith and Jeweller, also Shopkeeper and own business. This clue led me on a trail of discovery that led to a famous silver manufacturer in London. It turns out that Herbert Charles was the Senior Partner in a family business that was one of the most prestigious London Silversmiths in the 19th and early 20th century.

The Lambert's were part of a group of Huguenot silversmiths from France that fled to London in order to avoid persecution in the 18th Century. The business was started by Francis Lambert I (Herbert Charles' Grandfather) in 1803 opening a shop selling jewellery and silver plate in Coventry Street.

The company went from strength to strength and in 1851 they provided a large impressive group of silver to the London Great Exhibition and again in 1862 to the International Exhibition.

Following the death of his uncle Charles Lambert in 1901, Herbert Charles took over as Senior Partner of the firm in 1902 and set his stamp on the firm making many beautiful silver objects often in the current Arts and Crafts style. His own personal hallmark was also introduced onto the silver at this time.

*Silver Hallmark for Herbert Charles Lambert c1903*



By 1916, Herbert Charles was 64 and the firm was closed and absorbed in another form Harman and Co. where it continued trading as Harman and Lambert and was still trading in Bond Street up to the 1970s.

All of Lambert's silver is highly collectable, especially that made by Herbert Charles and shows up regularly at all the major auction houses. A fine example of his work can be seen in the small two handled cup below made around 1910, which is on sale for about £1,000.

*Herbert Charles Lambert, Sterling Silver Porringer c1910*



An advertisement for the shop in Coventry Street, Piccadilly can be seen in the illustration below.

There is a lot more to discover about this fascinating family and I look forward to carrying out further research in this regard.

**Lambert,** Goldsmiths, Jewellers,  
and Silversmiths  
TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING.  
10, 11 & 12, COVENTRY STREET, PICCADILLY, W.



A unique collection  
of Diamond  
Work, Enamels,  
and Works of Art.

Every description  
of Decorative  
Table and  
Ecclesiastical Gift  
and Silver Plate,  
ANTIQUE AND MODERN,  
and old  
Sheffield Plate.

Herbert Charles stayed in St. Leonards and moved just 10 minute walk from West Hill Road to 22, Albany Road, where he died in 1924. In his will he left £28,947, which in today's money is circa £2 million.

#### Summary of Last Will and Testament of Herbert Charles Lambert

**LAMBERT** Herbert Charles of Fairford 22 Albany-road **St. Leonards-on-Sea** died 30 March 1924 Probate **London** 20 May to George Herbert Lambert and George Harold Pearson esquires and Thomas Edward Partington solicitor. Effects £28947 3s. 3d.

## f) General Observations

Other than the house at No. 48, which was used to house the Municipal Water Board employees, the rest of the row of houses were occupied by, well to do, middle or upper middle-class families.

As the houses appeared to be mainly leasehold, the inhabitants were renting only and therefore there appeared to be a high turnaround of tenants.

The other interesting observation is that there were generally no inhabitants who had connections to the area, other than the water board workers, the servants and Thomas Case and his family. The majority of tenants had moved from London and other parts of the country; DFLs (Down From London) are obviously not a recent phenomenon.

Another fascinating fact is the number of families with no work and living off their own private means. If you look at the 1901 census sheet for the houses from No. 54 to 64, out of 5 families there are 4 of them living on their own means and one Solicitor with his own firm. This row of houses was definitely lived in by the seriously well off together with their much poorer servants.

One final observation is that there were many single, unmarried women including the sisters Eliza and Louisa Case, Anne the daughter of Edmund Parker and, although a bit younger, the three daughters of Herbert Charles Lambert,

Today, once again, this row of houses is mainly inhabited by people not brought up in the area, myself included, but the main difference is that we own the houses and we have invested in the area that we love and where we feel at home. Below is a photograph of Nos. 50 to 56 in March 2021, nearly 130 years old and still going strong.

