

## **George Coggins (1846-1920)**

### **Biography by David French**

George Coggins was born on 4 December 1846, the eldest of two sons of John Coggins, a carpenter, of Goose Green, Deddington, and his wife, Caroline. Sadly, his mother died young, at the age of 32, in 1855, when George had just turned 9.

It is known that George received a "sound education" at the Banbury Academy, a Unitarian establishment, which may well be attributable to the collapse of day schooling in Deddington for a time during the controversial incumbency of the Rev. James Brogden (Vicar 1848-1864).

Despite his humble origins, George must have shown exceptional promise, since the 1861 census records that by the age of 14 he was employed as a Solicitor's General Clerk. By the time of the 1871 census, George had progressed to the position of Solicitor's Managing Clerk.

George's principal was Mr. C. Duffell Faulkner, Coroner for North Oxfordshire, whose residence (The Priory) and offices (Coroner's Chambers) were in Hudson Street. Faulkner clearly identified George's potential, and in due course granted him articles of clerkship. George successfully passed the final Law Society qualifying examinations and was admitted as a Solicitor in 1877 at the age of 30.

Shortly afterwards Mr. Faulkner took Coggins into partnership, under the firm name of 'Faulkner and Coggins', and appointed him as Deputy Coroner for North Oxfordshire in June 1878.

Mr. Faulkner retired from practice in 1883, although he continued to act as Coroner for North Oxfordshire until 1892. Coggins then entered into partnership with W.G.W. Lovell, under the firm name of 'Lovell and Coggins'.

While Coggins was an active churchman, he seems to have avoided involvement in the bitter disagreements during his younger years between high church and low church Anglicans during the incumbency of the Rev. James Turner (Vicar 1864-1877), his principal Mr. Faulkner being a major protagonist on behalf of the latter faction.

The surviving press cuttings up to 1887 in Scrapbook no. 2 evidence that the acrimony continued well into the early years of the incumbency of the Rev. Thomas Boniface (Vicar 1878-1924).

Subsequently, George Coggins was to play a major role in church affairs in Deddington and for many years served as Vicar's churchwarden, although this is not recorded by the scrapbooks.

Nor does Coggins appear to have been swayed by the militancy of the local Temperance Movement in the 1880s, as evidenced by the cuttings in Scrapbook no. 2, despite its forceful leadership by Mr. Faulkner. Indeed, Scrapbook no. 3 contains sale catalogues for auctions of fine wines in 1889 and 1904.

Coggins held a number of public and professional appointments, including:

- Solicitor to the Deddington, Heyford, and Aston Benefit Building Society 1883;
- Solicitor to the Deddington Prosecution Association 1883;

- Clerk to the Magistrates of the North Wootton Division Petty Sessions 1886-1920;
- Coroner for North Oxfordshire 1892-1920 (Deputy Coroner 1878-1892);
- Clerk to the Old Age Pension Committee;
- a manager (one of the governors) of the Deddington National Schools;
- Steward of the Deddington Duchy Manor for the Cartwright family of Aynho Park.

While Coggins did not himself take part in outdoor recreations, he nonetheless gave his support to local sporting activities, becoming vice-president of both the Cricket Club and the Football Club. From the 1880s his name appears as a Starter at various sporting events, including the Golden Jubilee Sports in 1887. He was a member of the Deddington Billiard Club, and at his death was President of the Hermitage Bowling Club. Scrapbook no. 1 also records that in the early 1890s Coggins was a member of the Heythrop Hunt, although it seems unlikely that he would have ridden to hounds.

Surviving programmes for various dances from 1889 onwards list George Coggins as one of the Stewards.

One of Coggins' principal interests was politics. He was an active supporter of the Conservative cause. Initially with W.G.W. Lovell, he was local agent for Mr. L.M. Wynne of Nether Worton House, the unsuccessful Conservative candidate in the 1885, 1886 and 1892 general elections, and for Albert Brassey of Heythrop Park, Conservative M.P. for Banbury 1895-1906. On occasion Conservative party meetings were held at the offices of Lovell and Coggins. He became a member (Knight Harbinger) of the Primrose League in 1886. Coggins was Secretary of the Deddington Constitutional Club which was formed in 1887.

Accounts seem to have held a special interest. Scrapbook no. 3 contains copies of the financial statements of various local organisations (e.g. Football Club, Cricket Club, church heating apparatus). Coggins held a number of voluntary offices as treasurer (e.g. Coal Charity 1873, Volunteer Fire Brigade 1887). In 1919 he even stood down as Vicar's churchwarden to become people's churchwarden so he could take charge of the church accounts.

Coggins and his wife, Mary (née Holiday), who was some seven years his junior, lived at The Laurels (now Laurel House) in the Market Place. In 1897 the opportunity arose to purchase The Hermitage opposite, following the bankruptcy of another local solicitor, William Kinch, who absconded abroad leaving large debts. (Ironically, Kinch had been the Trustee in Bankruptcy in the *cause célèbre* of Henry Churchill, a prominent local solicitor, in 1870.) George and Mary Coggins moved into The Hermitage in early 1898.

Sadly, Mary, who was an invalid and had been in poor health for many years, died in January 1899, aged 45, leaving Coggins a widower at the age of 52. There were no children of the marriage. Coggins continued to live at The Hermitage, with a housekeeper and housemaid, until his own death in 1920.

At that time the grounds of The Hermitage included the land opposite on the north side of Horsefair (now occupied by Victoria House and the Holly Tree Club), which were kitchen gardens.

The reminiscences of Fred Deeley, who lived in Deddington all his life and died in 1998 aged 94, include the following:

*"Old Mr. Coggins, Solicitor, lived opposite the King's Arms [now the Deddington Arms] in a house with three dormer windows in the roof. At 3 o'clock the school children used to get into the square in front of his house and he used to throw out shovelfuls of hot halfpennies and pennies. He got his Housekeeper to warm them up so that when the children picked them up, they would quickly throw them down again, and the next boy would pounce, so that quite a few fights went on. Mr. Coggins looked on and laughed. Fred and his friends called him 'Pedgell' for some reason." [Recorded and published as 'Tangled Tapes' by Dorothy E. Clarke and reproduced here with her kind permission.]*

The scrapbooks evidence the lively interest which George Coggins took in local affairs. It seems that there were few aspects of life in Deddington (temperance being one of the exceptions) in which George Coggins was not actively involved at some time, or any public office which in the fullness of time he did not hold.

On account of his role as Coroner for North Oxfordshire, Clerk to the divisional Magistrates and Conservative party activist, Coggins would also have been well-known across the wider district. Indeed, in 1907 he was sufficiently prominent in county affairs to be profiled in *'Oxfordshire Leaders, Social and Political'* alongside the great and the good of the county. This provides an insight into Coggins' moral values, which could only have been gained through a personal interview.

Perhaps the below contemporaneous tributes to this modest and diligent man extracted from his obituaries should be allowed to speak for themselves:

- his amiable and kindly nature secured for him friends in all grades of life;
- the funeral of this much-esteemed gentleman . . . took place . . . amidst every demonstration of esteem and regard;
- his quiet, amiable, and unostentatious manner won for him the confidence of a wide circle of friends in the district.

# Deddington Jubilee Celebration.

## THE SPORTS

Will be held in a Field near the Gas Works, kindly lent by MR. W. HAWKES,  
(Entrance from Earl's Lane),

On Tuesday, June 21st, 1887,  
commencing at Three o'clock p.m.

Judges—Messrs. W. HAWKES, T. A. MANCHIP, and F. WARD.  
Starters—Messrs. G. COGGINS and J. A. HOLIDAY.

### EVENTS.

Time.	No.		
3-0.	1.	Hurdle Race (Handicap) ... ..	Two Prizes
3-10.	2.	Fifty Yards Sack Race ... ..	Two Prizes
3-25.	3.	100 Yards Egg and Spoon Race ... ..	Two Prizes
3-35.	4.	Bicycle Race (Handicap) ... ..	Two Prizes
3-50.	5.	Obstacle Race ... ..	Two Prizes
4-0.	6.	200 Yds. Flat Race, for Women. Three Prizes. (24, 18, & 12 yds. Calico)	
4-10.	7.	Mop Tournament (Pick-a-back) ... ..	Two Prizes
4-30.	8.	Donkey Race (Bare-back) ... ..	Two Prizes
4-40.	9.	One Mile Flat Race (Handicap) ... ..	Three Prizes
4-55.	10.	100 Yards Three-legged Race ... ..	Two Prizes
5-30.	11.	220 Yards Flat Race, for Boys under 10 ... ..	Two Prizes
5-40.	12.	440 Yards Flat Race, for Boys under 15 ... ..	Two Prizes
5-50.	13.	100 Yards Flat Race, for Girls under 10. Three Prizes. (18, 12, & 6	
6-0.	14.	100 Yards Flat Race, for Girls under 15. ditto ditto. [yds. Calico)	
6-10.	15.	Wheelbarrow Race (Blindfolded) ... ..	Two Prizes
6-25.	16.	100 Yards Flat Race, for Men over 50 ... ..	Two Prizes
6-35.	17.	100 Yards Flat Race, for Women over 50. Three Prizes. (24, 18, and 12 Yards Calico)	
6-45.	18.	100 Yards Pick-a-back. (To carry not less than 9 stone) ...	Two Prizes
7-0.	19.	100 Yds. Flat Race, for Women. Three Prizes. (20, 15, & 10 yds. Calico)	
7-10.	20.	100 Yards Flat Race,—starting with Coats buttoned inside-out, and to finish with Coats buttoned right side. ... ..	Two Prizes
7-20.	21.	100 Yds. Consolation Race, for Women. 2 Prizes. (15 & 10 yds. Calico)	
		Bobbing for Rolls. Dipping in Flour. Climbing Greasy Pole.	

**N.B.—NO ENTRANCE FEES.**

**Entries close for all Events on Saturday, June 18th.**

*Entries may be made to any of the Sports' Committee,—The Rev. S. R. Standage, Messrs. T. Bennett, G. Coggins, W. L. Franklin, W. Hawkes, J. A. Holiday, T. A. Manchip, J. Spiers, F. Ward, and J. B. Whyte. Sacks, Wheelbarrows, Eggs and Spoons, &c. will be provided by the Committee.*

**THOS. BENNETT,—Hon. Sec.**

CHARLES HOBLEY, PRINTER, DEDDINGTON.

Scrapbook no. 1, folio 241, Programme for Golden Jubilee Sports 1887

