

Avon Dassett and Syd Watts Peak, Canada

Kerrie Andrew

Syd Watts Peak stands at 1850m on Vancouver Island, Canada. Against the background of the Rocky Mountains of which it is part, 1850m is modest, but it is higher than anything we have in the UK.

Syd Watts was born in Canada to British parents. He's a cousin of my father through their maternal grandmother, Ada Jarvis (nee Barnes). Both my father and Syd have now died, and since their deaths in 2011 and 2013, respectively, I have begun a long trail of uncovering my family's past and finally, I arrive in the village of Avon Dassett.

After my father's death in 2011, I found an invitation to a wedding. Ada Barnes and Thomas Jarvis were married in Selly Oak, Birmingham. What intrigued me is that I have lived in Birmingham for a long time, having moved here when I got married, but I always thought my family were from Peterborough and Leicester. Suddenly they were more local. I was intrigued as to how Ada came to be in Selly Oak.

Looking back through the census information in the library in Birmingham, I found Ada's father, John Barnes, in Avon Dassett. I also found his father and his grandfather (all called John Barnes!).

I then checked the Avon Dassett website, where I found the History Society and the census listings that you have there. In the 1871 census, I found Ada, aged 2, living with her parents, John and Annie, next door to her paternal grandparents who lived at Woodbine cottage. I have discovered that Annie Barnes was a dressmaker by trade, and my mum still has her sewing machine. John Barnes was an agricultural worker, and by the 1881 census they are no longer living in Avon Dassett. John has become a metal worker and they are living in Selly Oak.

Ada and Thomas had two children, Lily, who was my father's mother and Connie who was Syd's mother. Connie left England in 1924 and married Sid Watts (senior) in Canada. Sid was from Bournville, Birmingham. He went to Canada in 1904, but at the outbreak of WW1 he served in the Canadian army and returned to the UK for a time before going back to Canada to live, taking two of his brothers with him.

Sadly, I have learnt much of what I know about Syd since his death and through the internet.

Syd Watts was born in 1927, in Olds, Alberta. He and his family moved to Vancouver Island in 1937 and so began a love of the outdoors for Syd. He was a mountaineer and a keen bird watcher. He retired from his job at the age of 50 to enable him to spend more time outdoors. He was involved in projects to build hiking trails and became warden of an ecological reserve.

It was in 1970 that Syd and his wife, Emily, climbed what is now Syd Watts Peak in Strathcona Park. It was officially given the name by the Canadian government in 2010.