

WYLDE GREEN HOUSE, SUTTON COLDFIELD

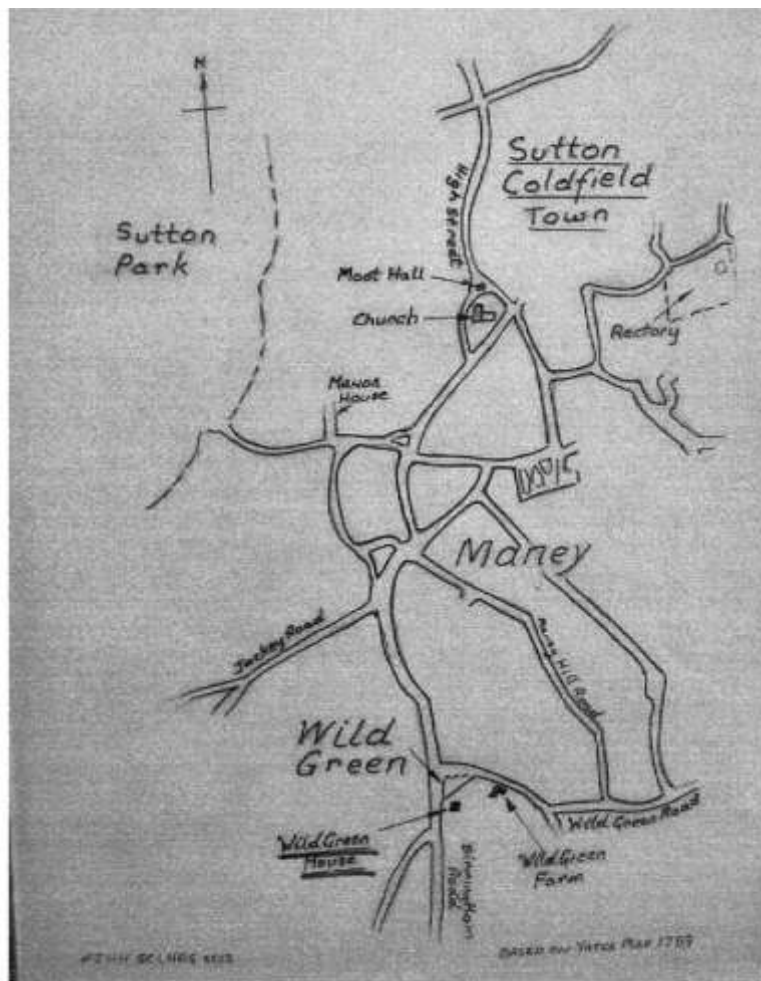
A short history of this once prominent house

By Alan Howells

The Wylde Green district, south of the town, between Sutton Coldfield and Erdington, had been an agricultural and farming area since the middle ages. Earliest records of the area date from the fourteenth century.

For over four hundred years the major land owners and farmers were the Sedgewick family. They lived in the farmhouse of the large Wylde Green Farm situated east of the Birmingham Road and south of Wylde Green Road (originally Walmley Road). Most of the farm is now occupied by Walmley Golf Club.

The farmhouse was a large Tudor residence rebuilt in 1639 using bricks manufactured by hand from local clay. The farm was large, the fourth wealthiest estate in Sutton after Moor Hall, New Hall and the estate of the Rector of Sutton. The family was prominent in town affairs, various Sedgewicks holding the office of Warden.



Map of Sutton Coldfield in the eighteenth century, based on Yates' 1789 map of Warwickshire.

The 1600s and the first Wylde Green House.

The farm was being managed and run by tenant farmers living in the farmhouse, and the Sedgewicks decided to have another house built on part of their land close to the green at Wylde Green. It stood at the junction of Wylde Green Road and Birmingham Road with easy access to the road network; this was the first Wylde Green House.

No details of this house have been found except for a plan of its location. It is recorded in the Hearth Tax returns for Sutton Coldfield in the 1670s as having one hearth, whereas the large farmhouse was taxed on six hearths.



Painting by the author of the location of the first Wylde Green House at the Green

Henry Sedgewick died in 1694, leaving the farm and the estate, including Wylde Green House, to his three nephews; his widow, Mrs. Sedgewick, continued to live at Wylde Green House.

The House in the 1700s.

The first record of the house is the conveyance in 1715 by Sedgewick's nephews to Rebetia Laggin for £147 (MS369/13).

The house was in an ideal location in several acres of grounds, a very desirable property, and it continued to change owners throughout the eighteenth century at an ever-increasing price.

- 1749 William Cooper takes a mortgage to buy the house and five acres of land (MS369/3).
- 1787 Martha Cooper to John Oughton, lease of house and land for £190 (MS369/5a).
- 1787 John Brampton purchases the house for £250 (MS369/6).
- 1791 William Ward takes over the house.

The House in the 1800s.

1816 Mrs. Ward (widow) releases house and land to Sam Louis for £1,000 (MS369/9a).

1824 Act of Parliament for the enclosure of the common lands of Sutton Coldfield.

1827 James Belles purchases the house for £1640 (MS369/12).

1827 The Rev. Hyla Holden takes over the house. (MS369/14a).

The Rev. Hyla Holden was a prominent citizen, Warden in 1831 and 1832, and had been Vicar of Erdington. Enclosure of the commons affected wide tracts of land to the west of Birmingham Road, and the Green at Wylde Green also passed into private hands.

1837 “House recently taken down and rebuilt” (MS369/15). This was the end of the first Wylde Green House, demolished prior to the erection of a new magnificent house in larger grounds.

The New Wylde Green House (1837).

The new large Victorian house on the corner of Wylde Green Road and Birmingham Road was to dominate Birmingham Road for the next one hundred and fifteen years.



“A house of some size and pretension” according to Riland *Bedford’s History of Sutton Coldfield* “equipped from motives of economy with casements of sufficient size to light two rooms at once, and with other strange but substantial divergencies from ordinary constructions.” The few large windows avoided excessive window tax – the window tax continued to be levied until 1850. The grand new house with its splendid gardens, drive and entrance lodge was to be home to a succession of wealthy Suttonians.

1839 George Jones purchases the house for £1200 (MS369/17).

1840 John Meredith purchases the house (MS369/22).

1844 Meredith conveys to Mrs. Grace Campbell Bedford for £2,900.

Mrs. Bedford was the widow of William Riland Bedford, Rector of Sutton from 1822 to 1843. She had to vacate the Rectory for the new incumbent, Richard Williamson; Williamson in turn gave way to W.K.Riland Bedford in 1850. Mrs. Bedford moved away from Sutton in 1850, (she died at Lichfield in 1875), and the house was briefly occupied by W.K.R.Bedford.

Dr. Thomas Chavasse, Sutton's eminent doctor and surgeon, moved into the house with his large family in 1850. His surgery in Sutton High Street was very well known and popular.

At this time the gated entrance with its entrance lodge was built alongside Birmingham Road (still standing in 2012); stables and cottages were added at the rear of the house. Chavasse was hospitable and there were frequent entertainments over the next thirty-eight years, the hey-day of the Victorian house. Prominent Suttonians were welcome guests, and the Holbeche Diaries refer to enjoyable visits there. The Doctor, his wife and four children were looked after by a staff including nurse, housemaid, parlourmaid, cook, groom, gardener, and a fourteen-year-old page boy.

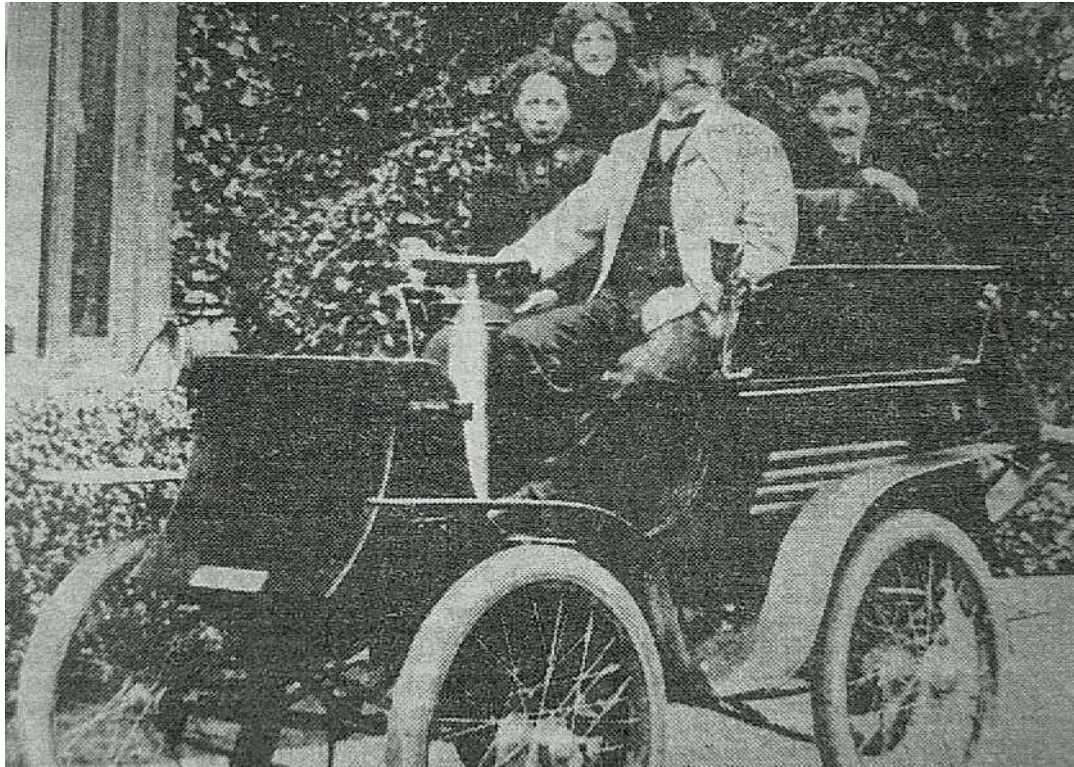


The old entrance lodge and gate to Wylde Green House, 2012.

Dr. Chavasse died in 1888, and the Ansell family moved in to Wylde Green House. William Ansell was a solicitor, son of the founder of Ansell's Brewery in Aston. He was a governor of Sutton Grammar School and a Sutton Coldfield magistrate, well-known for his philanthropy and a supporter of many charities. He died in 1904.

The house in the 1900s.

Mrs Martin is listed as living in the house until 1919, and the Pilkingtons in the 1920s. Arthur Pilkington was a wealthy manufacturer of early motor cars, having set up Allard and Co. in 1889 with Frederick W. Allard. He was 58 in 1921 with a grown-up family. He purchased some fields near Maney from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and went in for property development – Plikington Avenue and St. Bernards Road were laid out and houses built. He died in 1929 and the house was sold.



Pilkington family and car.

In the 1930s, with the great depression and widespread unemployment, there were no more wealthy Suttonians prepared to take on the prestigious house, and in 1932 a religious order, The Society of the Divine Saviour, converted the house into an Oratory. About twenty men lived there for a number of years, including monks wearing the Salvatorian black habit.

The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 saw further changes. Many of the impractical large houses were taken over for civil defence during the war, and the nearby Wylde Green Farm served as a US Army reporting base and messing station.

In 1952 there was an application to the planning committee of Sutton Coldfield Borough Council for the demolition of Wylde Green House and its outbuildings and the construction of a cul-de-sac of houses on the site. Finstall Close now occupies the site of the house which had been a feature of Wylde Green for three hundred years. Other Victorian houses, along with Wylde Green Farm, met a similar fate in the 1950s to meet the ever-increasing demand for modern housing.

References

The Wragg Collection, Birmingham Reference Library MS369 series.
Directories, Electoral Rolls and census records in Sutton Reference Library.
Newspaper Cuttings and photographs in Sutton Reference Library.
Sarah Holbeche's Diary and Richard Holbeche's Diary, Sutton Reference Library.