

THE POPLARS

204 Birmingham Road, Wylde Green – the oldest of the large houses on Birmingham Road.

By Alan Howells



History of the Wylde Green area.

Sutton Coldfield originated from a Saxon village; it is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 when it was a royal manor. It developed into a medieval market town under the Earls of Warwick, with much of the surrounding forest and chase used for hunting. The Royal Town was incorporated by a charter of Henry VIII in 1528 as a self-governing town. The small town centre was surrounded by extensive commons (including Sutton Park) and farm lands.

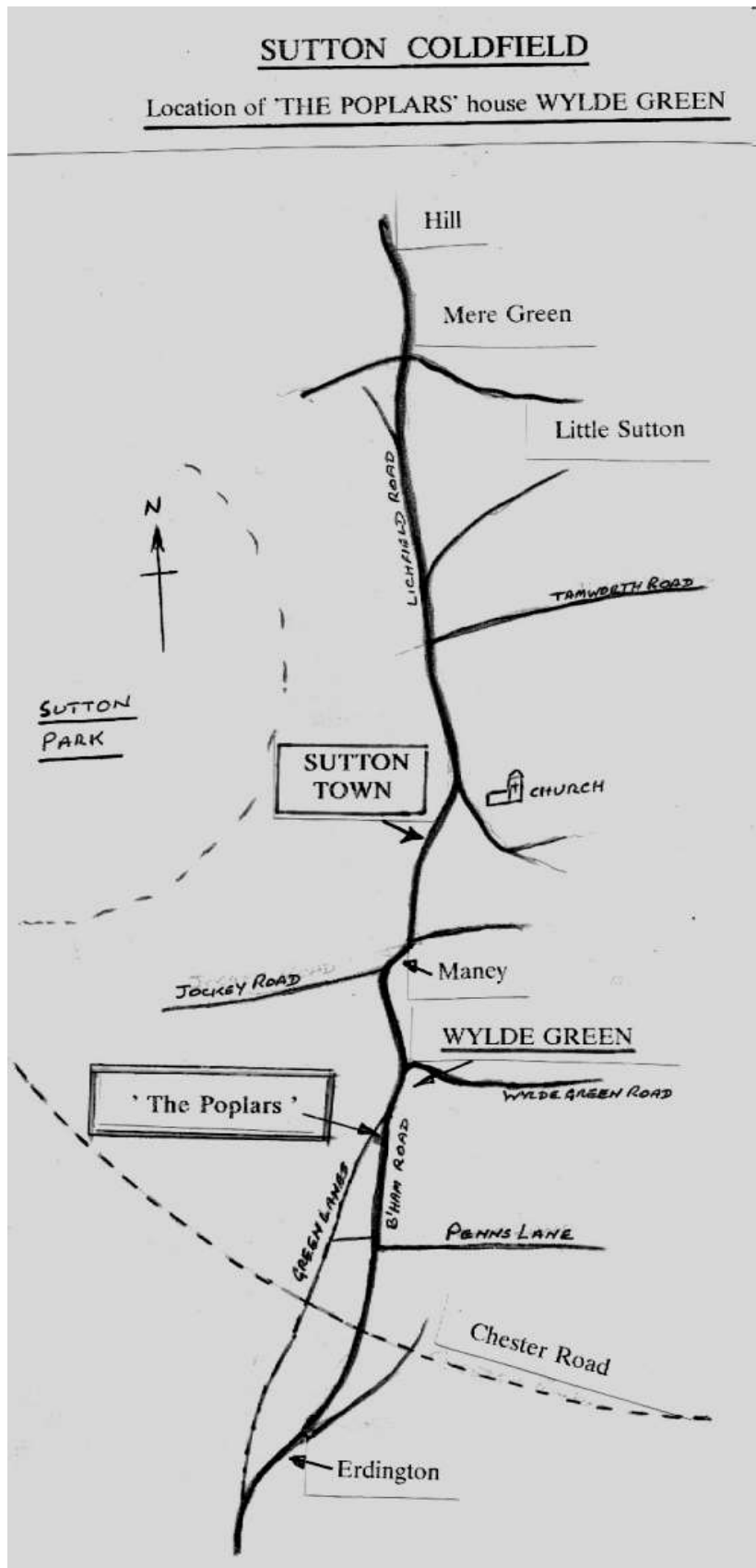
The area to the south of the town (now Wylde Green) between Maney and Erdington village consisted of uncultivated commons interspersed with agricultural land, dominated by the large Wylde Green Farm. Across this wild area ran the main road from Birmingham through Sutton Coldfield and beyond to Lichfield and towns to the north. This is Birmingham Road, a busy road from 1750 onwards with many horse-drawn carriages and carts travelling along it. It became a turnpike road in 1806, with trustees to take tolls and repair and improve the carriageway.

There were fields alongside the road and open commons not far away. The Sutton Coldfield Enclosure Act of 1824 provided for the common land in Sutton to be allotted to private owners; this included wide roadside verges, such as a narrow strip on the corner of Green Lanes. This and part of the nearby field was to be the site of the first large house to be built on Birmingham Road in the early 1800s, "The Poplars". In the ensuing decades a considerable number of large houses, or villa residences, were built along Birmingham Road.

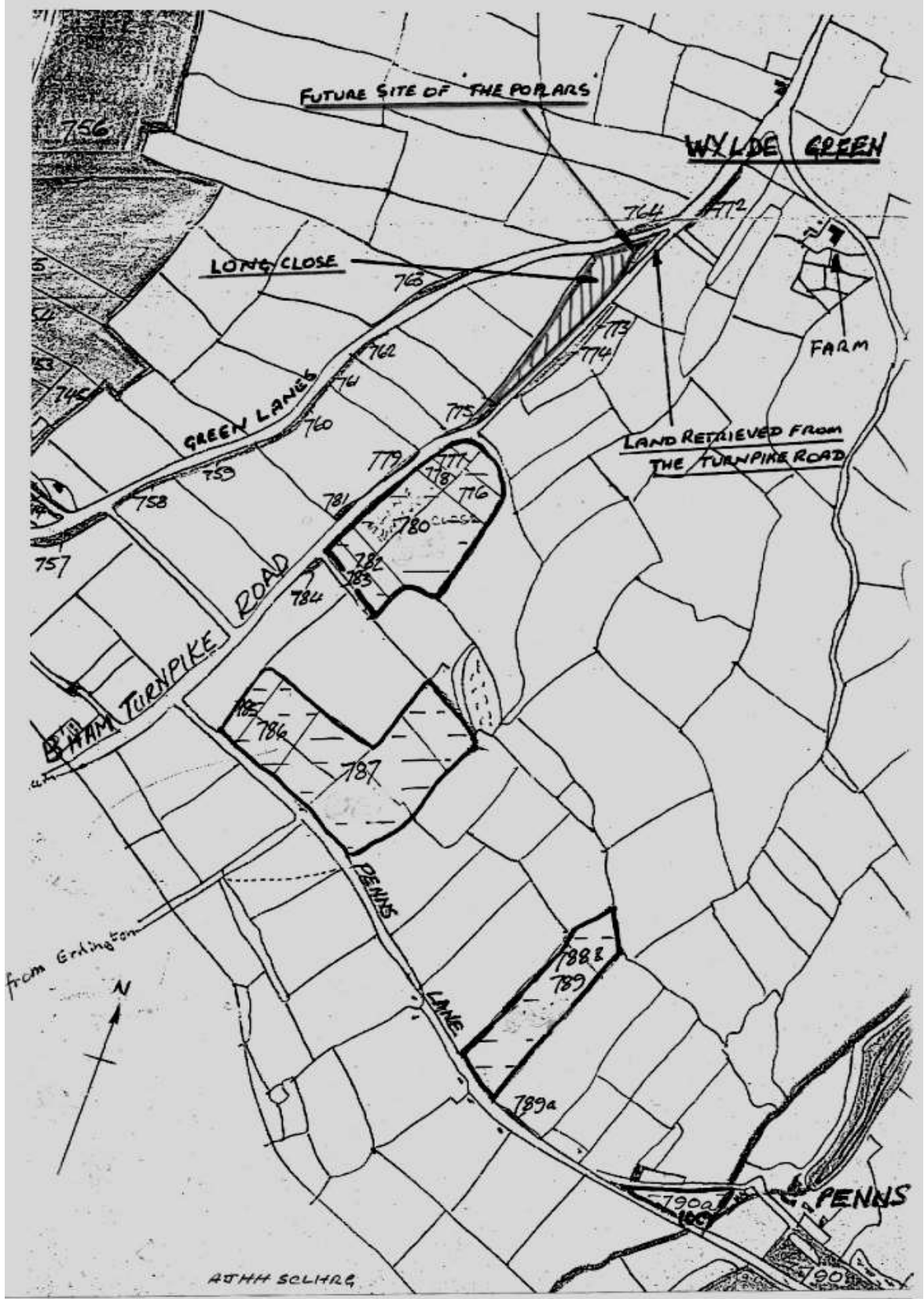
The First house.

This first house, The Poplars, is now 204 Birmingham Road. The house was built in the late 1820s or early 1830s, at the end of the Georgian period, when the only other buildings in the area were Wylde Green House and some small cottages. The name derived from native white or black poplars which have been grown in Britain for centuries; Lombardy and balsam poplars were later introductions.

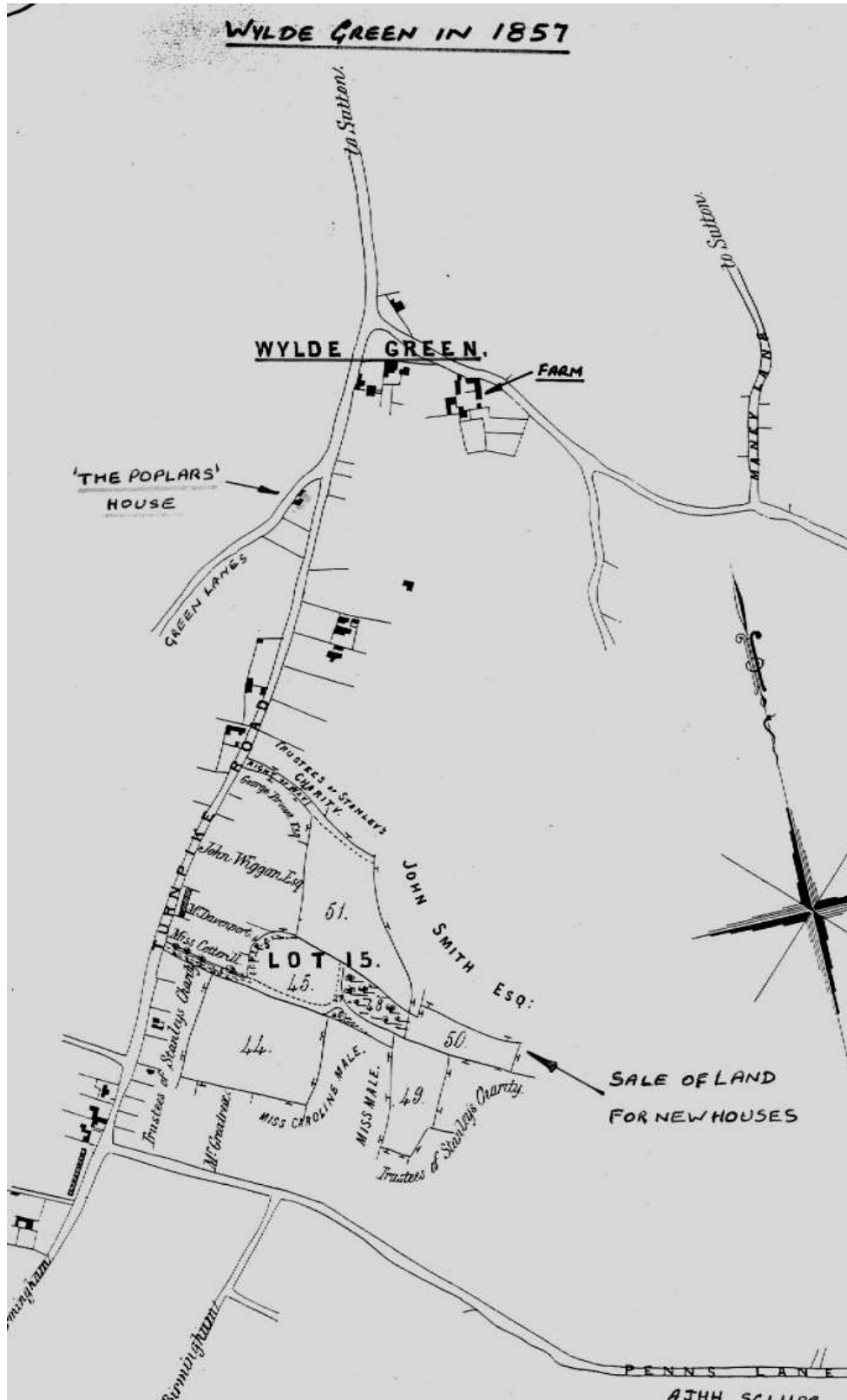
The house predates the reign of Queen Victoria, being either George IV (1820-1830) or William IV (1830-1837). Its architectural style is late Georgian, probably the only house of any size of this period in Sutton.



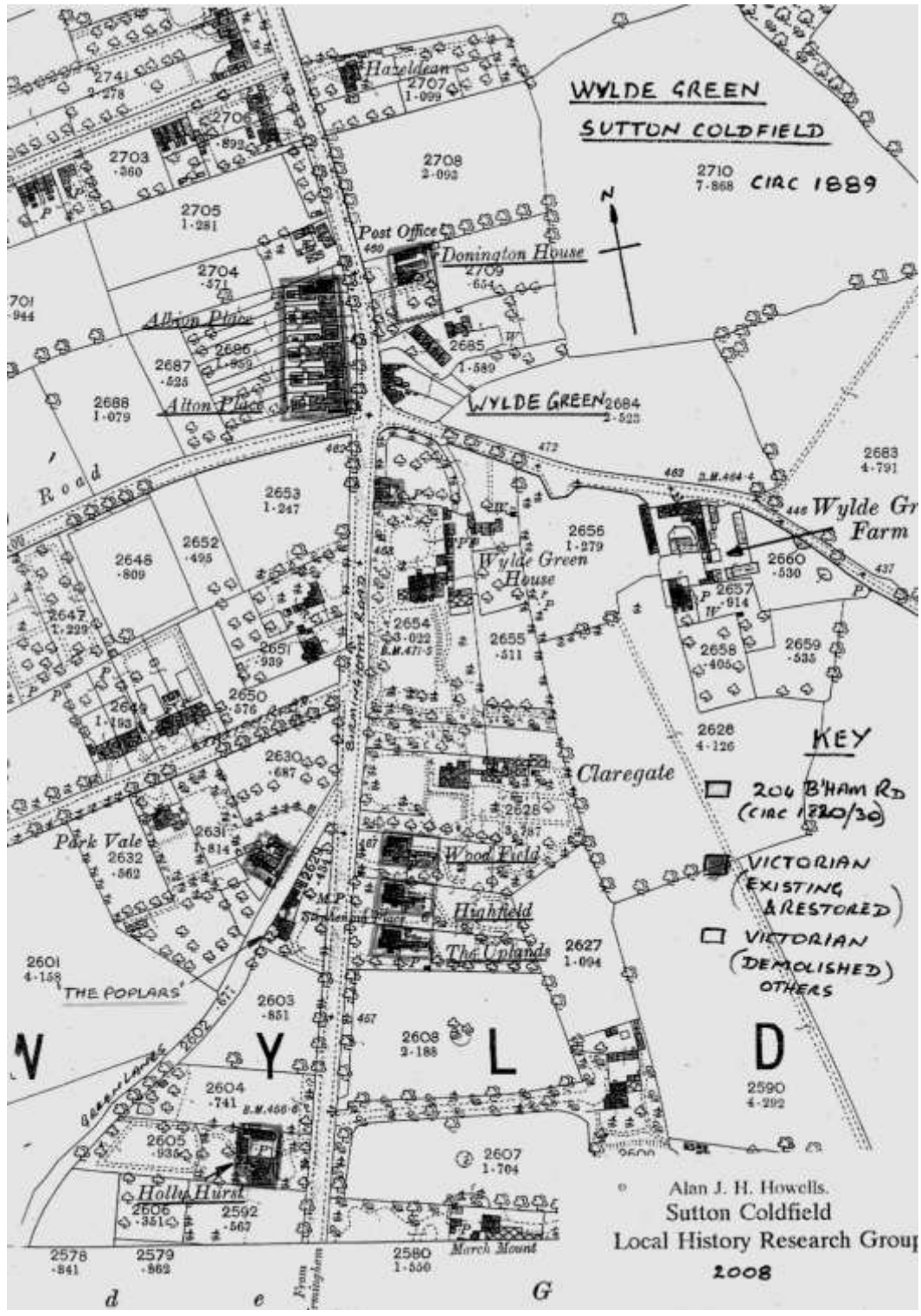
SUTTON GOLDFIELD
THE FIELDS OF WYLDE GREEN IN THE 1820's



The peak period for travel along the turnpike road was the 1830s, with stage-coaches and mail coaches travelling between Birmingham and the north. With the growth of the industrial towns wealthy manufacturers and professional men were building villa residences for themselves in the surrounding countryside, and by 1850 many suitable sites along Birmingham Road were being developed.



The railway arrived in Sutton Coldfield in 1862, with its station at Wylde Green; this seems to have prompted further house-building in the area, particularly in Birmingham Road. The houses were for businessmen travelling by train to work in Birmingham. Donington House, for example, is still there, now converted into apartments. Albion Place and Alton Place are blocks of terrace houses for middle-class commuters, opposite Wylde Green Road. Gradually the remaining fields in the area near Birmingham Road were filled in with substantial houses.



Ordnance Survey 25" slightly reduced

The turnpike road lost traffic to the railway, and was disturnpiked in the 1870s when the Birmingham and Watford Gap Turnpike Trust was wound up.

In the 1950s and 1960s, when the original 99 year leases ran out, some of the large Victorian house were demolished to make way for small housing developments and estates. These fine Victorian houses were ill suited to modern needs, and the appearance and character of Birmingham Road reflects these changes, which still continue. However, the first house of this kind to be built alongside Birmingham Road, "The Poplars", remains. It retains its unique Georgian appearance, though there are later Victorian additions to the rear and bay windows have been added to the front and side elevations. The extensive cellars are still there, but the remains of the original coach house and stables were demolished in 2003 so that a new house could be built at the east side.

Records of the house.

1824. The Corn Rent map; the land at the corner of Green Lanes and Birmingham Road was known as Long Close; it was owned by Joseph Hargreave and occupied by Evan Oliver. The Poplars was not yet built, as it is not on the map.

1830. A Directory lists Charles Barker of Wylde Green under "Nobility, gentry and clergy". All the other properties in Wylde Green suitable for someone of this status can be accounted for, so he had presumably built The Poplars by this date. The original house in the Georgian style had only eight windows, probably to save tax; the window tax was in force from 1695 – 1851. The Barkers built other houses on Birmingham Road later in the century, but retained ownership of The Poplars.

1841 census. Evan Oliver, age 65, Farmer (previously farmed the land on which the house was built); wife (or sister?) Hannah age 80, and three servants, William Reynolds and Joseph Holmer (15) and Hannah Evans (10).

1850. A Directory lists Samuel Loveridge at Wylde Green.

1851 census. Samuel Loveridge (67) retired grocer; wife Anne (68); Son Henry (40) Manufacturer; servants Katherine Swan (21) and Walter Grimmy (23); two Irish labourers.

1854. A Directory lists Samuel Loveridge at Wylde Green.

1854. Hawthorn Lodge, on the opposite side of Birmingham Road, was built, the residence of William Barker. Other villa residences were built.

1857. The Parochial Valuation gives William Barker as owner and Ann Loveridge occupier. The property is described as House Outbuildings Yard and Garden occupying 39 perches and an additional piece of seven perches (160 perches = 1 acre).

1860. Samuel Loveridge of Wylde Green, 1782-1860 buried at St. Johns Church, Walmley.

1860. It was about this time, following the repeal of the window tax, that alterations were made to the house. A two-storey wing was added at the northwest corner incorporating sash windows on the first floor removed from the ground floor front, where bay windows were installed. Bay windows were added to the west elevation. These alterations were carried out

for William Barker, probably while Ann Loveridge was resident. The resultant larger house would have comparable status with the new Victorian villa residences.

1861 census. Hawthorn Lodge: William Barker (32), electro-plated ware manufacturer employing 100 men; his wife Ann (24); Elizabeth Haynes (23) servant and Joseph Greenwood (30) gardener.

The Poplars: Ann Loveridge, widow (79), Louisa Wildman (9) granddaughter; Mary Fennel(26) servant and John Commin (26) gardener.

1861-2. Rate Books show owner Samuel Loveridge, occupier William Wilson.

1862. Opening of the Sutton Coldfield Branch of the LNWR with a station in Station Road, Wylde Green, making commuting to Birmingham less dependent on horse-drawn transport and bringing cheaper coal, delivered from the coal wharf at Chester Road.

1866, 1868 Directories. Mr. William Barker, Hawthorn Lodge, Wylde Green.
Mrs. Ann Loveridge, Wylde Green (The Poplars).

1871 census. Hawthorn Lodge: William and Ann Barker; children Ada (9), Kate (7), Herbert (6), Florence (1); servants Mary Ann Scotson (23) and Antonette Scotson (18).

The Poplars: Ann Loveridge (88); daughter Harriet Wildman (46); grandchildren Louise Wildman (19), George (19) and Harry (17) Wildman, both clerks; Harry Smith (20), coachman and Louisa Newborough (20) servant.

1871. Burial at St. Johns Church, Walmley, of Ann Loveridge, 1782-1871.

1872. Directory. Mr. William Barker at Hawthorn Lodge.

1881 census. Hawthorn Lodge: William Barker (53) Silversmith, Ann and children Ada (19), Lilian (9), Rhoda (8) and Frank (7), two servants.



Silverware of the period.

1881 census. The Poplars: Charles Thomas Motteram Flewitt.

1891 census. The Poplars: Charles T.M. Flewitt (78), retired chemist, Sophia Collins (family) (34) and servant Amelia Ann Green (24).

1892 Directory. Mr. C.T.Flewitt, The Poplars.

1898 and 1900. Building plans submitted to Sutton Coldfield Borough Council for alteration to The Poplars for F.S.Wood Esq. (late W.Barker Trust). These are the additions to the rear north-east corner of the house, adjacent to Green Lanes. The coach house and loose box in the grounds remain. The application, no. 990, includes plans of the house and the extensions).

1900 Directory. Mr. C.T.Flewitt.

1901 Census. The Poplars: George Moore (37) general brassfounder, wife Amy (25), daughter Marjorie (2), cook Annie Hughes (22) and nurse Sarah Hudson (24).

1908 Directory: Mr. George Moore.

1916 Directory Mr. Robinson Sealing Burn (The Poplars).

1970s Old stables and coach house in the grounds converted into a studio workplace.

1990s. Bungalow built on land at the corner of Birmingham Road.

2004. The owner, Mr. Abell, demolished the remains of the old stable and built a separate house facing Green Lanes. The old house was put up for sale but not sold.

2006. An application to demolish the house and erect three dwellings on the site was rejected by the City Council and further rejected by the Government Planning Inspectorate on appeal. The house was put up for sale again.

2008. The empty house was purchased by Mr. A.Price of AJP Carpentry and Joinery. The 1898 extension at the rear was replaced with a two-storey building, and the house was refurbished to a high standard.

References.

Sutton Borough Records, including rate books and planning applications.

Corn Rent and Enclosure Award with maps, 1824 – 1851.

Parochial Valuation and map 1857.

Census enumerators' books and Directories.

The Story of Sutton Coldfield by R. Lea, 2003.

The author's investigation of Hollyhurst House and participation in planning appeals.

Birmingham to Watford Gap Turnpike Act, 1807.



“The Poplars” looking southwest from Birmingham Road, 2004



“The Poplars” looking south from Green Lanes; the stable block in the foreground was demolished shortly after this photo, behind is the 1860 extension with the sash windows which were transferred from the ground floor front, and the two-storey lean-to extension of 1900 which was demolished in 2008