

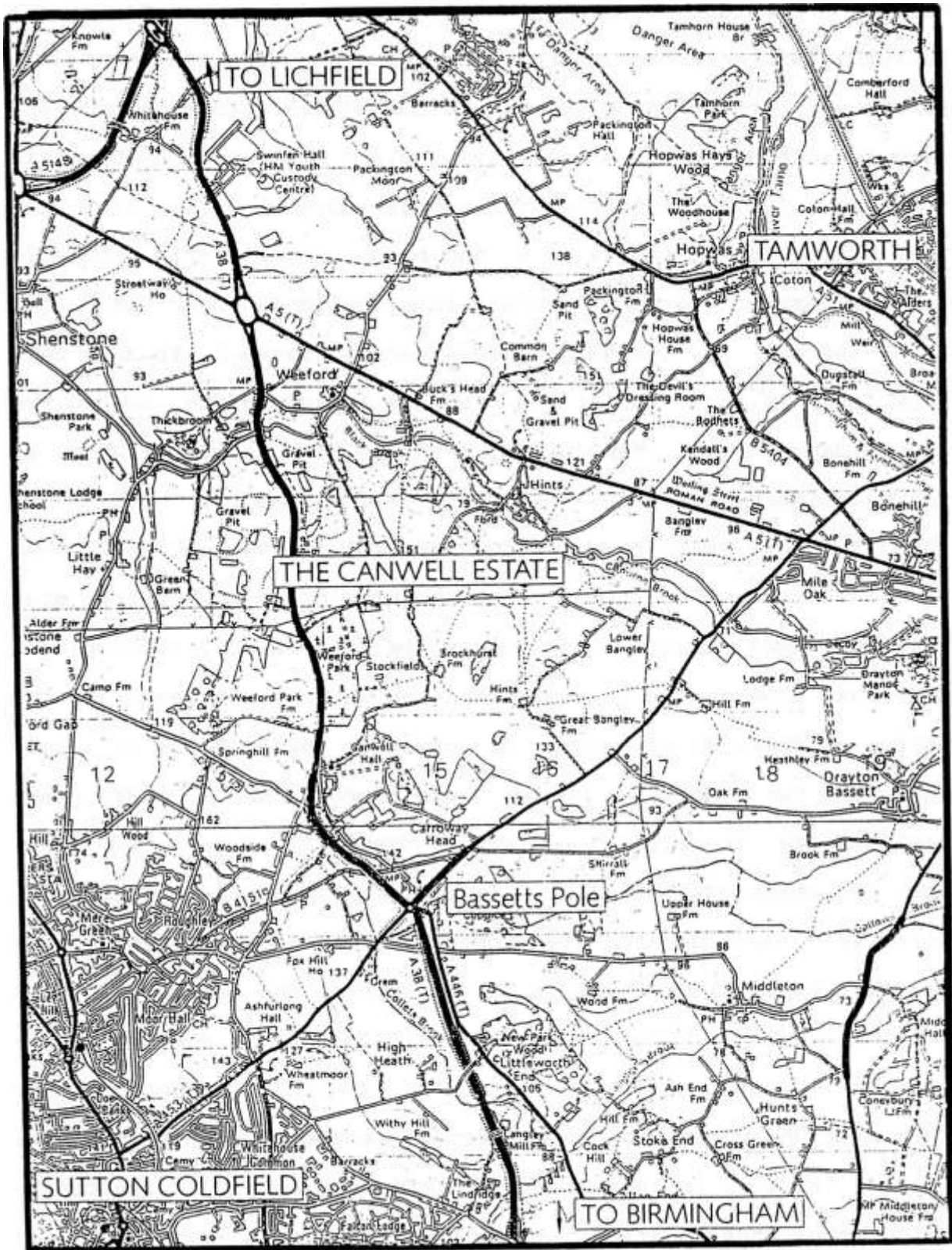
CANWELL IN THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES

BY MICHAEL VOWLES

In my beginning is my end. In succession
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.

East Coker. T.S.Eliot

In May 1835 Thomas Cammack, landlord of the Canwell Gate Inn, supplied twenty dinners at two shillings each, 'malt liqueur', at two shillings each and 'rum, gin and brandy' for ten shillings and six pence to diners who had probably travelled to Canwell from Sutton Coldfield for their entertainment.[1] Thomas Cammack, the landlord, appears in the 1851 Census.[2] He was born in Saxilby, Lincolnshire, and at the time of the census was aged 67. He was thus born in 1784. When, or why, he came to Canwell is not easy to know, He appears first in 1822 as a witness to a legal document about the 'settlement of estates in Staffordshire', as the Butler to Sir Robert Lawley.[3] Whether he was an astute business man, an ingratiating friend or just lucky is not clear. What is clear is that by the will of Sir Robert Lawley[4] dated 1825 he inherited a life interest in land and two associated properties in Little Sutton a mile or so from Canwell. Further, in the will of James Smith,[5] of Bassetts Pole in Staffordshire, dated 1827, Thomas Cammack also inherited in trust the freehold property called Bassetts Pole' and he and James Smith's widow Maria turned up at Lichfield on 16th June 1828 to secure probate on Smith's will. At this time Cammack was described as 'of Can-well in the County of Staffordshire Agent to Sir Robert Lawley.'



The will involved some complications concerning the deceased's wife.[6] These were neatly solved however on 20th April 1829 when a 'marriage by licence was solemnized in the Parish of Weeford between Thomas Cammack, bachelor and Maria Smith of the parish of Drayton Bassett, widow'.[7] By the time of the 1851 census[8] Thomas Cammack was a 'victualar' living at the Bassetts Pole Inn (which he had inherited under Smith's will) with his wife Maria. She, like Cammack, had been born away from Canwell: in Scarborough Yorkshire. Their three children born in 1832, 1834 and 1837 had however all been born in Canwell. Thomas Cammack died in 1867 aged 74 years and is buried in the churchyard at St James Church, Mere Green, by which time he was living in that parish[9] possibly in his inheritance from the 1825 will. Thus from his arrival, some time before 1822, Cammack had lived in or near Canwell. After his death his influence in the area lived on. When Canwell estate was to be sold in 1872 a complicated legal case ensued involving the son of Thomas Cammack and the heirs of James Smith concerning the exact implications of James Smith's will for a mortgage on the Bassetts Pole Inn of fifty years earlier.[10] Canwell had truly been Cammack's place. What and where was this place, Canwell, that Cammack had made his life in? Some uncertainty surrounds the exact provenance of Canwell: especially if the parish is seen as the irreducible unit of local identity. The census of 1861[11] refers, almost sneeringly, to 'the extra-parochial place of Canwell'. 'Place' rather than Parish suggest something less wholesome and less certain. White's 'History and Gazetteer of Staffordshire'[12] while continuing the uncertainty of 'extra parochial' adds some details: Canwell, an **extra parochial** estate (emphasis in original) of 260 acres, and 27 souls, near the border of Warwickshire, 5 miles S.W. of Tamworth. By 1880 its identity had been established. Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire[13] for that year says, Canwell : formerly extra parochial, is now

a parish 5 miles S.W. of Tamworth and 6 miles S.E of Lichfield, and, for good measure, adds that it is '113 miles from London'! By 1896 Canwell's identity is secure. In the Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire[14] for that year it is generously described as 'a parish extending to the borders of the countyin the Lichfield division of the county, South Offlow Hundred and Tamworth petty sessional division, union and county court district.' Here too, we have further clues to the place.

The Kelly's Directory goes on to say that 'Canwell Hall is a spacious mansion, and is the seat of Abraham Briggs Foster lord of manor and sole landowner' The population in 1896, Kelly's declares, is 78. Of these it goes on to list: Abraham Briggs Foster, Canwell Hall; Joseph Anderson, head gamekeeper to A.B.Foster; John Thomas Eccleston, head gardener to A.B.Foster and John Townsend Glover, steward to A.B.Foster: Canwell was always co-terminus with the estate, the Hall and the owners of the Hall.

Canwell was once a priory(Iafrati 1988). It appeared early -- 1524-- on Cardinal Wolsey's list of monasteries 'not worth retaining', was abolished, and fell into the hands of a number of rich aristocratic families. First the Harmens, from 1528 to 1590, then the Pearshalls from 1590 to c1660 when it was purchased by Sir Francis Lawley a baronet from Shropshire. This family was connected with Canwell for the next two hundred years. The estate and whatever other local land they chose to buy belonged to them

and their presence in the area is testified by plaques in Weeford and Hints churches to the 4th(1729–1793) , the 5th(1779–1793) and the 6th (1793–1834) baronets recording their deaths. What is not so clear is how much time they spent in Canwell and what they lived in if and when they did.

The Lawleys connected with Canwell[15] are as follows:

Francis Lawley	2nd bt	from 1646 to 1696	*	=
Thomas Lawley	3rd bt	from 1696 to 1729		
Robert Lawley	4th bt	from 1729 to 1779		
Robert Lawley	5th bt	from 1779 to 1793		
Robert Lawley*	6th bt	from 1793 to 1834		
Francis Lawley*	7th bt	from 1834 to 1851		
Paul Beilby Lawley Thompson*	8th bt	from 1851 to 1852		
Beilby Richard Thompson	8th bt	from 1852 to 1880		

brothers .

It is not clear when the Hall in any recognisable post monastic form was built. There was a substantial dwelling on the site in 1729 when Sir Thomas Lawley the third baronet died. The inventory, made in May 1730, for Sir Thomas's will discloses a well-furnished thirty-nine roomed dwelling on the site.[16] This inventory shows the following rooms with the usual list of contents: a gallery, left hand bedroom, right hand bedroom, cradle room, the purple room, Mrs Prument's room, camblet(sic) room, damask room, velvet room, closet, drawing room, dining room, left parlour, ? parlour, hall, great stairs, yellow mohair room, plane room, inner closet, still room, guilt(sic) leather room, room at the end of the nursery, men's chamber, the ale seller(sic), small beer seller(sic), green house, buttery, dairy, laundry, kitchen, larder, smoke house, new laundry, bake house, pastry room, closet, garden house.



T. Donaldson Del: et

To Mr. Rich^d Lawley Bar^t
CAVWELL HALL, is inscribed



this North East View of
by his Obliged humble Servant. J. Shaw:

In 1798 Stebbing -Shaw refers to a '....curious old fabrick, with bay windows and gothic ornaments which was destroyed by tenants about forty years ago(1759?) to make a plain straight front.'[17] It seems from this that the fourth baronet(Sir Robert Lawley) had built or extended some kind of house on the site in the 1750's if the Stebbing-Shaw account is accurate. He continues :

" The late Sir Robert Lawley erected an excellent house and was so satisfied with the goodness and convenience thereof that he has often been heard to say, that his son would have nothing to do but enjoy himself in it. They, however, seem so far from coinciding in that opinion, that, soon after his decease, the present baronethaving a large increase of fortune, began upon the present superb mansion under the direction of Mr Wyatt the expense is said to be about £60,000."

There follows some detailed architectural description of the hall including a reference to 'the stair-case an unique specimen of taste and elegancebeautiful ornaments and a cupola' and a reference to a 'most admirable library, of large dimensions' and 'The views from the house and grounds are very extensive, bold and beautiful, over the wildly-tossed hills at Hints, towards Lichfield, and over Tamworth.'

The eighteenth century may have experienced three Canwell Halls and certainly two: the one to which the 1730 inventory refers, the one built around the 1750's(or, if not newly built, greatly extended) and, the last house on the site built in the mid-1790's.

Houses seem to have been in Canwell but were the Lawleys? The inventory of 1730 suggest that the family was living in the Hall at that time. However, Stebbing -Shaw in the account quoted above suggests that the house was tenanted as early as the mid-eighteenth century. He goes on to say(Stebbing-Shaw 1798):

" Sir Robert Lawley, bart. married, 1764, Jane only daughter of Beilby Thompson, of Escrick in Yorkshire, esq. and dying at Canwell , March 11th, 1793, aged 57.....

At this point, 1793, the 5th baronet seems to have been living at Canwell. However, the fortunate marriage in 1764, to 'the eventual heir of Beilby Thompson of Escrick in the County of Yorkshire' directed the Lawleys interests to Yorkshire and away from Staffordshire. The sixth and seventh Baronets were a succession of brothers and Sir Robert Beilby Lawley Thompson(a name change possibly contingent upon inheritance) was the one 'on whom his uncle B.Thompson had devised his great estates.' In addition he had been created Baron Wenlock, Co Salop on 13th May 1839 resurrecting an old title with which the Lawleys were associated. There were in fact five more barons before, in 1932, the peerage finally died out

By 1793, when the 6th baronet succeeded to the title, they had fairly substantial land holdings in or near Canwell. This seems to have been acquired by inheritance and judicious purchase. In an 'Epitome of Title',[18] prepared in 1872 when the estate was finally sold, Sir Robert Lawley is shown as owning 500 acres in Drayton Bassett, and 1247 acres in Weeford. This latter holding was a result of the 5th baronet(Sir Robert Lawley) interfering in the affairs of the Manleys of Thickbroom just down the road.

When John Manley tried to consolidate his Weeford holdings and tidy up a will dating 1737 Sir Robert 'gazumped' him and bought

shares in the Manley lands in Weeford. The ensuing dispute between Sir Robert and John Manley was settled, after a court case, on 26th April 1785 when they each drew lots for ownership of parts of the Weeford estates at the house of Sarah Wyatt, Blackbrook Farm in Weeford.[19] He also had other 'manors, lands and hereditements' in Canwell, Drayton, Hints, Weeford, Batterscot, Tamworth, Fazeley, Packington and Bilson. The acreage of these extra holdings is not given but the Canwell estate alone was over 260 acres. In 1793 Sir Robert Lawley was thus the owner of upwards of 2000 acres of local land contiguous to Canwell. In 1834 he bought a further 427 acres in Drayton Bassett and between these dates had added land and buildings in Roughly and Little Sutton. Canwell and its Hall thus was at the centre of a modest (by wider national standards) estate. Records of how and by whom the land was farmed have not so far been unearthed. What seems clear is that the income from the estate was substantial.

In his will dated 1825[20] Robert Lawley left his wife 'Lady Lawley' a life interest in the 'mansion-house in which I now reside situate at Canwell and also of the several pieces of land surrounding the same. The will goes on to list what must have been the names of the pieces of land which made up the Canwell estate. The value of these is not specified. In a codicil to his will made in 1831 he left on trust 'the messuage or tenement in Carlton House Terrace lately erected and built for me and in which I am now residing' to be sold for £20,000: the proceeds were to go to his son. A further codicil to the 1825 will in 1832 finds Sir Robert '.....dwelling in Florence for many years past(sic).....being as he declared troubled with his eyesBeing desirous of appointing Guardians for my four

adopted children that is to say Roberto, Elisa, Francesca and Enrico dwelling in Tuscany born of Signora Giocoma Carolina de Val and by me adopted by an instrument of 1st February 1830.....' and in possession of a number of properties in Italy. Who ever was managing and farming the estates back in England Sir Robert was undoubtedly a substantial beneficiary. Amongst the items which Lady Lawley inherited 'in trust' for the son was Canwell Gate Inn. Besides the Hall and the outbuildings Canwell Gate Inn seems to have been the only other occupied building.

On 25th August 1727 a 'stranger', Thomas Eastham, was buried at Sutton Coldfield. It seems that he was found 'murdered at the upper end of a bye-lane called Holly Lane. He was decoyed to the fatal spot from Canwell gate, a publick Inn on the left hand side of the Lichfield and Coleshill turnpike road'.[21] The person convicted of the murder Edward Powers, 'that was then drinking in the house' had misdirected the 'stranger' then murdered him, was hanged by the neck and 'then gibbeted afterwards on Little Sutton common' on 25th April 1728.

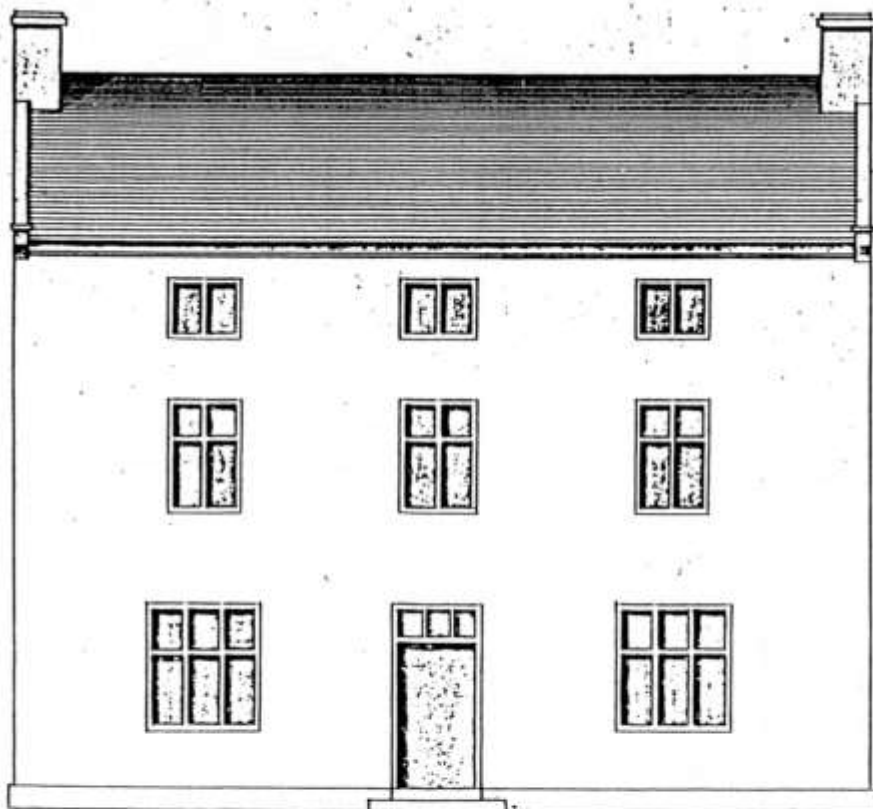
Canwell Gate Inn was, it seems, in existence early in the 18th century and almost certainly earlier. This old inn seems to have been replaced in the 1760's when Sir Robert Lawley commissioned, for three hundred pounds and the materials of the old house (inn), a new one at Canwell Gate to be built by Benjamin and William Wyatt[Figs. 1-5] Six wills (the only ones referenced) in the Lichfield Record Office throw further light both on the Inn and who, in addition to servants of the Hall, might have been in Canwell

Mem^o of an Agreement between Sir Rob^t Lawley Bart^t
and Benj^m & W^m Wyatt in manner following that is to wit
The said Benjamin & W^m Wyatt in consideration of the sum of
Three hundred and fifty Pounds and the Materials of the old
House doth agree to Build Erect & Complet in a Plain
Substantial and Workman like manner a new House at
Canwell Gate according to the within design And the said
Sir Rob^t Lawley doth agree to Pay or Cause to be paid to the
said Benj^m & W^m Wyatt the sum of One hundred and Fifty
Seven Pounds ten shillings on or before the 5th day of April
next and the remaining sum of One hundred & Fifty Seven
Pounds ten shillings upon the Completion of the Building
as aforesaid Witness our hands, this 27th day of Novemb^r.
1762

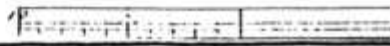
Rob^t Lawley
Benj^m & W^m Wyatt

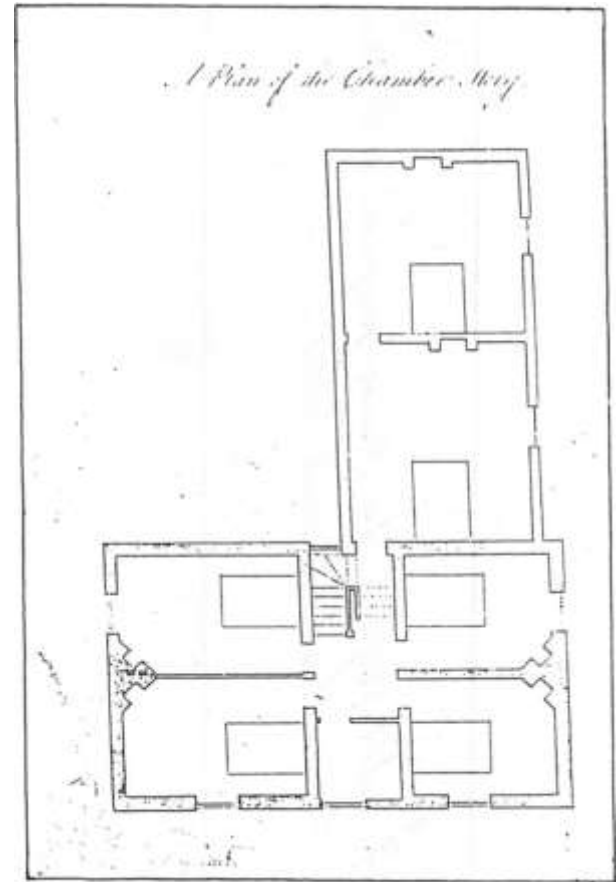
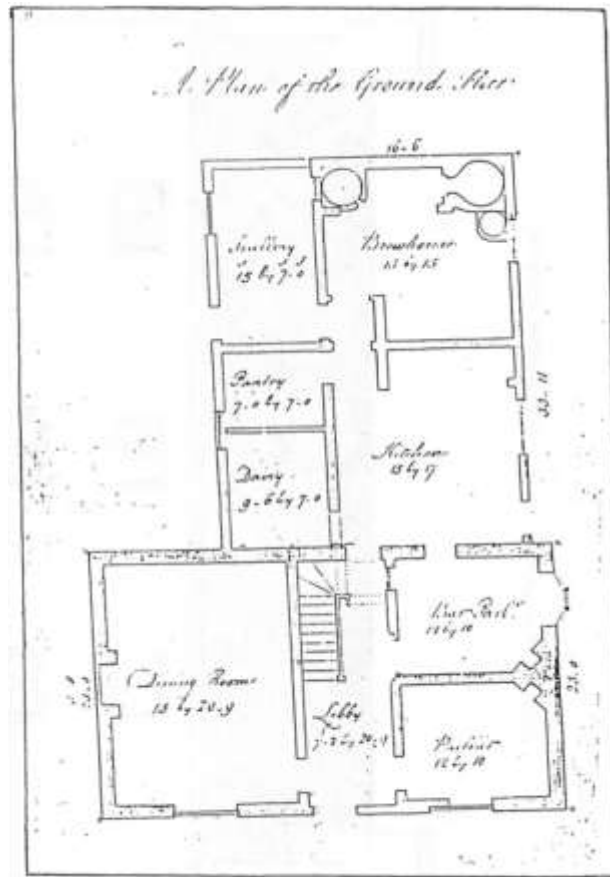
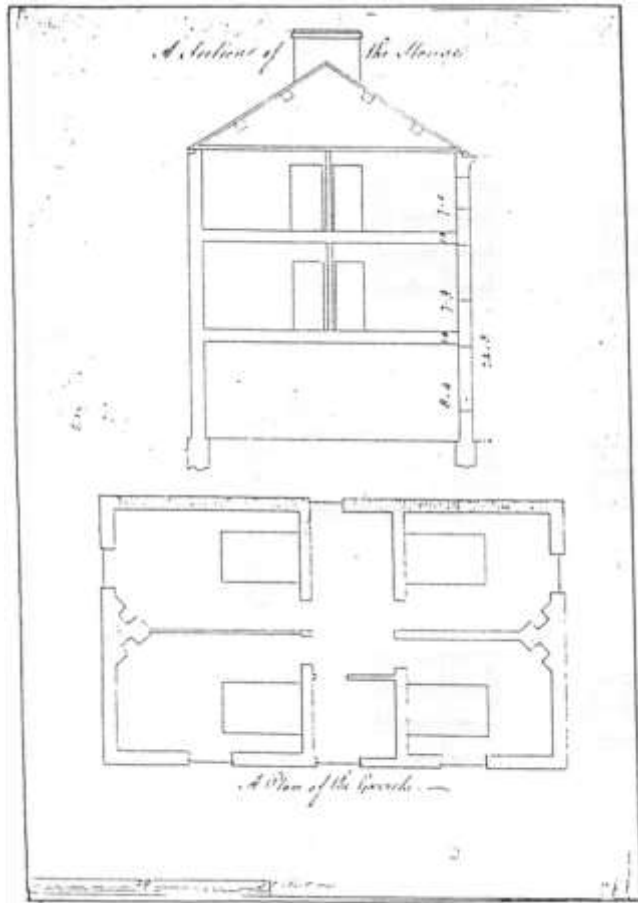
*A Design of a House proposed to be Built
at Cannall Gate*

Front towards the London road



Extends 30 feet





around this time. The six wills are:

Edward Fowke	1630	no occupation given
Wm Hunt	1745	yeoman
Wm Underhill	1758	Inn holder
Maria Smith	1785	Wife of John Smith gentleman
Thomas Biddle	1801	yeoman
Robert Pipe	1819	Inn keeper and auctioneer

From Fowke's will[22] it is clear that there was a building of some substance in Canwell at this time -- and before the Hall. The inventory gives a hall, a buttery, a chamber above the parlour, the parlour is not mentioned separately but must have existed if a room was above it, a cockloft, a chamber above the hall, a chamber above the kitchen and the kitchen. William Hunt's will [23], in which he is declared to be a 'yeoman', of 1745 also indicates a fairly substantial dwelling(possibly the same one as in Fowke's will of a hundred years earlier) with the house'(obviously a room since it contained a fire grate and other furniture), the parlour, the back parlour the pantry , the brew house , chamber over the house , chamber over the parlour, chamber over the brewhouse, chamber over the pantry (not otherwise mentioned) and the cellar which contained £9 worth of 'ale barrells'. With the specific mention of the brew house and malt in the chamber over the pantry' this might have been the Canwell Gate Inn, with, from other items mentioned (four pigs, rick-yard, hay, plough and harrow, cows, sheep and heifers), some form of mixed farming. William Underhill[25] is described as an 'Inn Holder of Canwell Gate' and again, in 1819, another will of Robert Pipe[25] gives his occupation as Inn

Keeper and asks that his wife keep the Inn and farm subject to the permission of Sir Robert Lawley. The Inn remained in existence, as indicated above when Cammack entertained his guests, and is last mentioned in the Census of 1851[26] when 'Canwell Gate Inn' was occupied by John Clarke described as a groom.

Documentary evidence establishes that by the 19th century there was at least the Hall and a wayside Inn in Canwell. Evidence of those who lived there for an earlier period is lacking. The census however gives details of the numbers for the 19th century and the following picture emerges:

Year	Population
1801	36
1811	28
1821	24
1831	24
1841	27
1851	42
1861	43
1871	47
1881	38
1891	78
1901	52

The 1841 Census is not too informative and, apart from Canwell Hall, lists no buildings. Households are grouped together under Canwell. No Lawleys are listed in the Hall which has as its only residents a Hannah Hranguiy aged 59 and Hannah and Matilda aged 25 and 22. No occupation is given in 1841. In 1851 what must be

the same family (the name is now spelled Haurgaway and Hannah is 65 not 69 as she should be based on the entry in 1841) are still the only people in the Hall with her husband now on the scene as a 'servant' and she 'housekeeper' For the rest, five household groups are mentioned each of which is 'headed' by an agricultural labourer, (2) a gardener, a builder and a farmer respectively. The 1851 Census is more informative. There is still no 'important' person living at the Hall which is clearly being 'looked after' by servants -- no agent is listed in the Canwell population. The remaining ten households are all connected with the Hall with the exception of the Canwell Gate Inn. The places listed in four censuses are:

	1851	1861	1871	1881
The Hall	Y	Y	Y	Y
Farm-yard cottage	Y	N	N	N
Dwelling attached to stables	Y	N	N	N
Dwelling attached to stables	Y	N	N	N
Dwelling room in laundry	Y	Y	N	N
Garden Cottage	Y	Y	N	N
Brickyard Cottage	Y	N	N	N
Gamekeeper's Cottage	Y	N	N	N
Canwell Farm	Y	Y	Y	Y
Brick kiln cottage	Y	N	N	N
Dairy cottage	N	Y	N	N
Lab 's Cottage	N	Y	N	N

Though the occupational community and the physical community are clearly centred on the Hall comparison between the 1851 and subsequent censuses is impossible since the same descriptions of buildings is not used(see table above) . What did change between 1851 and 1861 was the occupancy of the Hall. By 1861[27] a Lord Newford had moved in described as a 'Tory Councillor'. He had a full entourage: a fowler, two footmen, a coachman, a

cab boy - aged 13! - a stable lad, a lady's maid, a cook, housemaid, laundry maid and nursery maid. In 1861 those not living in the Hall were a gamekeeper, two agricultural labourers, a farmer. Again, Canwell and the Hall were more or less the same. By 1871 a Colonel Ferars Loftus aged 72 occupied the Hall with his wife aged 61 a son aged 37 and another son and his wife and their four children. The household contained a full complement of servants as it did in 1861.

Never very committed to Canwell the Lawleys were obviously renting out the Hall and estate to whoever would pay the rent. In 1862 'by deed duly enrolled in chancery Beilby Richard Lord Wenlock barred the entail on all Manors, Lands and Estates and acquired an absolute Estate in fee simple'. [28] The final stage of Canwell estate was about to begin, In 1872 the 9th baronet Sir Beilby Richard Lawley served notices to quit on all tenants including Colonel Loftus and, at the Hen and Chickens Hotel in Birmingham [coincidentally? built by James Wyatt (Robinson p339)] on 25th October 1872, Canwell Hall and estate was sold for £207,475 to Abraham Briggs Foster of Northowram Hall Halifax, Yorkshire .

Details of Abraham Briggs Foster are not easy to find. Nor is it possible to discover much about how he dealt with the estate. Much more research would be needed to have a clearer picture of the man, and his way of life. There is evidence that he was involved in the local school which had 'commenced work as a Public Elementary School' in 1885 in so far as frequent visits are recorded in the log book. [29] The school was subsequently named the Philip Foster School after his son who also caused

the church to be built in 1911. The original Foster died in 1904 leaving the Hall and estate for the use of his wife in trust for his son. The value of his estates is recorded as £501,309.9s.7d.[30] His wife died in 1915 and the son lost very little time in selling the estate. In March 1920 the Canwell Estate including the Hall was sold to the City of Birmingham to become a rehabilitation centre for First World War soldiers. Later the estate was divided into small holdings and tenancies and the Hall became a Children's Hospital. Kelly's Directory of 1928[31] contains the valediction on Canwell Hall:

"Canwell Hall, a spacious mansion stands situate in a finely timbered park and having some tastefully laid out grounds, is the property of Birmingham City Council, and was formerly a convalescent home".

In 1957 the Hall was finally destroyed.

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NOTES REFERENCES AND SOURCES

Because of Canwell's uncertain status -- extra parochial -- and relatively small population, documentary sources are fairly scarce and spread over a number of collections. References are therefore to specific documents prefixed with an abbreviation to identify the collection as follows:

SRO Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford.
SROL Staffordshire Record Office, Lichfield
SCLH Sutton Coldfield Library, Local History Section.
BPL Birmingham Public Library, Archive
 Department.
TPL Tamworth Public Library.

Birmingham City Council bought the Canwell estate in 1920 and, as a result, secured the estate documents which were deposited in the Birmingham Public Library Archive in 1975. This is a collection of 276 documents in 33 bundles dating, mostly, from 1793 to 1880. They are mainly legal documents relating to the estate and are described as: Canwell and Weeford Estates Schedule of Title Deeds. They are numbered MS264/1-276. The remains of the Wenlock collection, a substantial archive of mainly legal documents concerned with land ownership, are deposited in the Brynmor Jones Library and Archive in the University of Hull. These documents are prefixed with:

BJLH Brynmor John Library, Hull

1. SCLH: 174 [receipt].
2. SROL: HMSO, census 1851, Canwell.

3. BPL: MS264/4.
4. BPL: MS264/36. (incoreectly dated 1835 in the hand list)
5. SROL: Will of James Smith of Bassetts Pole Inn, 1828.
6. SROL: Will of James Smith of Bassetts Pole Inn, 1828
7. BPL: MS264/204.
8. SROL: HMSO, census 1851, Canwell.
9. Probate Registry London, Will of Thomas Cammack, 1867.
- 10.BPL: MS264/189.
- 11.SROL; HMSO, Census 1861, Canwell.
- 12.TPL: White's, 'History and Gazeteer of Staffordshire' 1872.
- 13.TPL: Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1880.
- 14.TPL: Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1896.
- 15.This table is put together using information from Stebbings-Shae(1798) , Harwood(1844), Burkes Peerage.
- 16.BJLH: 18
- 17.STEBBING -SHAW(1798)
- 18.BPL: MS264/36 Epitome of Title dated 1872 and MS264/38 Disentailing Assurance
19. BPL. MS264/274
20. MS264/36
21. This table is put together from Stebbing -Shaw(1778).
22. SCLH: SC48. This is a hand written account of aspects of the history of Sutton Coldfield produced in 1855 by a local resident Z. Twamly, then aged 75, based it seems on examination of various parish registers and documents. There is no explanation of the type or selection of the sources. An entry in the Parish Register(SCLH) confirms the 'burial of a stranger', that he was murdered, and the doer of the deed was 'gibbeted' in Little Sutton.

There is no reference to Canwell but the writer
is unlikely to have made up the details.

23. SROL: will of Edward Fowkes of Canwell, 1630.
24. SROL : will of Wm Hunt of Canwell, 1745.
25. SROL : will of Wm Underhill of Canwell, 1758.
26. SROL: Will of Robert Pipe of Canwell. 1819.
27. SROL : HMSO , Census 1851 , Canwell .
- 28 . SROL: Census 1861, Canwell .
- 29.BPL: MS264/71.
- 30.SRO: D3654. Canwell School Log Book.
31. Probate Registry London: FN/1127. Will of Abraham Briggs
Foster of Canwell Hall, Staffordshire, 13th September 1904
and Rosamund Susanna Foster (FN/1933) 20th June 1913.
32. TPL: Kelly's Directory of Staffordshire, 1928.