

# Wylde Green Farm Sutton Coldfield

*By Alan J. H. Howells.*

## Sutton's Farmland

On the south side of Sutton Coldfield, the borough boundary of the town, before it became part of Birmingham in 1974, was near Chester Road; in the early 20th century, Erdington Urban District Council lay to the south of this boundary. Until the second half of the century, travelling along Birmingham Road towards the south, most of the town's houses finished at Maney, with its smithy and travellers' inn, 'The Horse and Jockey'. Much of the remaining land between Maney and the borough boundary near Chester Road was agricultural, with fields and farms. This formed a green belt from Boldmere (common and waste land) eastward through Wylde Green and Penns (farmland) to Walmley Village (commons) and 'Beyond the Wood'. (See map A)

## Location of the Farm

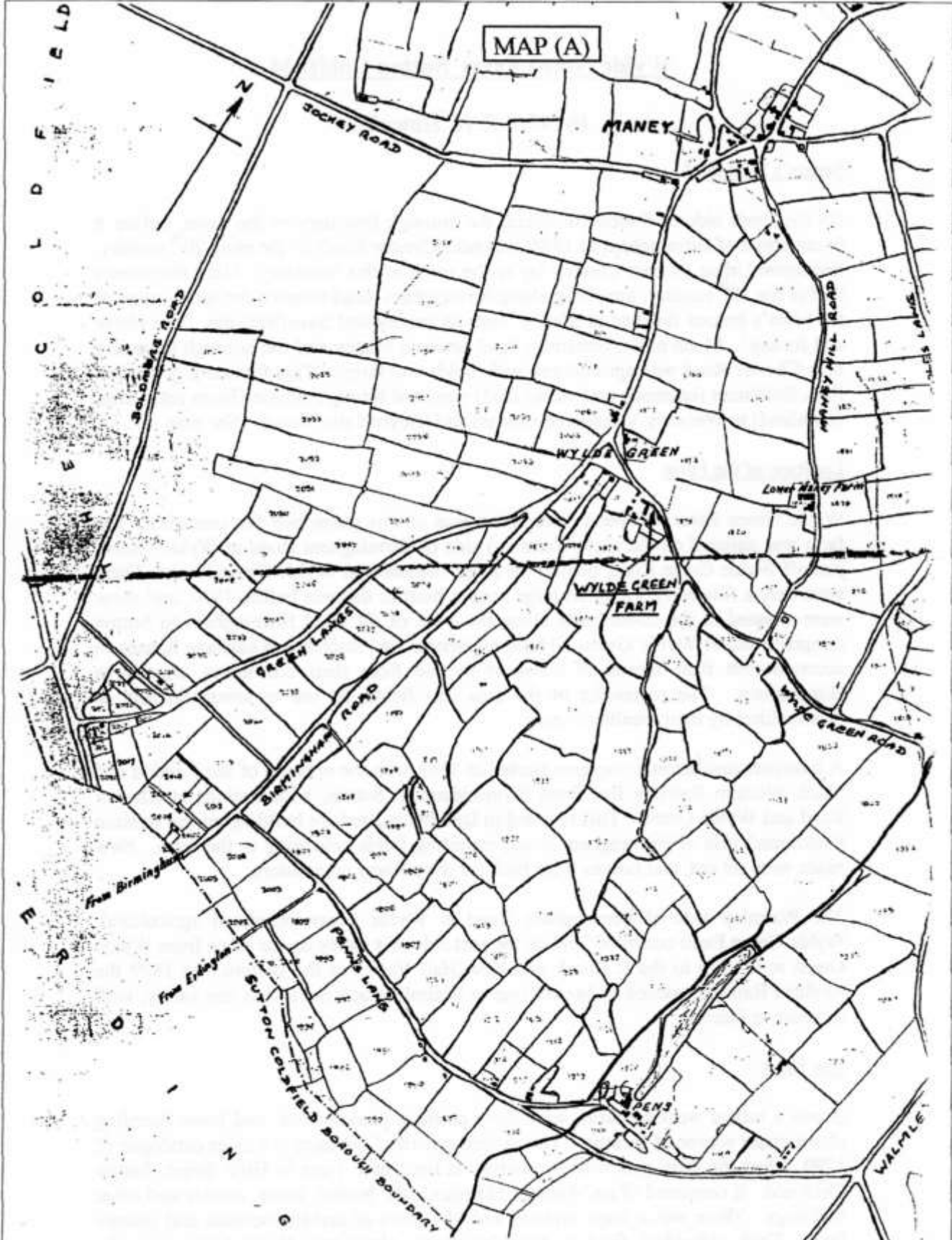
Wylde Green Farm had been farming an area of this green belt for centuries. The farm was situated on the east (Walmley) side of Birmingham Road at Wylde Green, just off Wylde Green Road, behind the large, ostentatious Wylde Green House. There were only a few early Victorian large houses built in the area before 1850, and these were situated in the countryside along the edge of the rural Birmingham to Sutton turnpike road at Wylde Green. These residences had stables and carriage houses to accommodate their means of transport to and from their businesses, usually in Birmingham. The remainder of the area was fields, let out to tenant farmers or smallholders by their wealthy owners.

A transport revolution in the area started in 1862 with the opening of the London and North Western Railway line from Birmingham to Sutton, with stations at Chester Road and Wylde Green<sup>1</sup>. This resulted in land being used for building on the western (Boldmere) side of Birmingham Road, including fields belonging to the farm. New roads were set out, and houses were built for the railway commuters.

The Walmley side of Birmingham Road at Wylde Green remained agricultural, Wylde Green Farm occupied land on the east side of a valley on the slope from Wylde Green at the top to the E Brook and New Hall Valley at the bottom. In 1879 the Midland Railway opened its branch line to Walsall which ran across this valley, with a station at Penns.

## The Farm

It was a mixed working farm, with dairy produce predominant, and horse-breeding also a major source of income. The earliest record of the farm is a sales catalogue of 1790, when the farm was sold by auction at the Three Tuns in High Street, Sutton Coldfield. It consisted of an 'Ancient Mansion' (the house), barns, stables and other buildings. There was a large orchard and 164 acres of arable, meadow and pasture land. Each individual field is listed by name, about two thirds being near the farmhouse on the east side of Birmingham Road, the rest being to the west towards the Coldfield (Boldmere) (map B). The nature of the country is described in the



THE FARMLAND AND FIELDS OF SOUTH SUTTON COLDFIELD 1824

catalogue as 'a fine sporting country, abounding with game; commanding many delightful and extensive views'. Also mentioned are timber trees, a stone quarry, marl pits, clay for bricks, and nearby lime. It was an important farm in the area<sup>2</sup>

The tenant farmer sold up and left the farm in 1818. A document of this date records his belongings and also tells us much about the farm. The farmer, Mr. W. Davis, had a dairy herd and he (or his wife) made cheese in the dairy. He brewed his own ale in the brewhouse and stored it in the cellar under the house. They had servants and farm labourers who ate with the farmer in the large kitchen. The parlour was a comfortable room with a carpet on the floor, card tables, pictures on the walls, even a stuffed bird in a cage and a more useful ornament, the barometer to try to predict the weather. There was a fully equipped blacksmith's workshop with anvil, forge etc. on the farm, also much equipment and many implements which indicate how the farm was worked. Horse-breeding was important, and he also kept pigs and a large number of sheep.<sup>3</sup>

The farm is recorded in the 1824 Corn Rent Schedule, and it is shown as owned and occupied by Joseph Clark; the 1856 Parochial Valuation gives the farmer as Joseph Line, altered soon after to E. Jenkins.

In 1882 the farm was rented by Mr. J. Conchar, a Scotsman who had moved to a new house in Station Road, Wylde Green in 1873. He concentrated on breeding horses at Wylde Green Farm, making it into a very remunerative stud farm. He raised shire and hackney horses as well as grazing cattle and sheep. He was elected to the new borough council, and served as mayor of Sutton Coldfield in 1892/3. The Conchar family continued to run the farm as a very well-known and successful stud farm until the 1920's.<sup>4</sup>

A new tenant farmer then took over, Mr. Throup, who continued to run it as a stud and mixed farm, the milk produced being supplied to the area. Deliveries were by horse and trap, and the milk was ladled into the customers' containers from chums. In the 1930's his son Mr. Albert Throup took over the farm, his previous farm having been Eachelhurst Farm; this was near to the railway bridge on Eachelhurst Road opposite the Penns goods siding and cattle pens. The Throup family continued at the farm throughout the Second World War, when part of the farm was used as an eating base for American servicemen billeted in Sutton Coldfield. The farm was finally closed in 1957 when the landowners sold the land for housing development.<sup>5</sup>

### The Farm Land

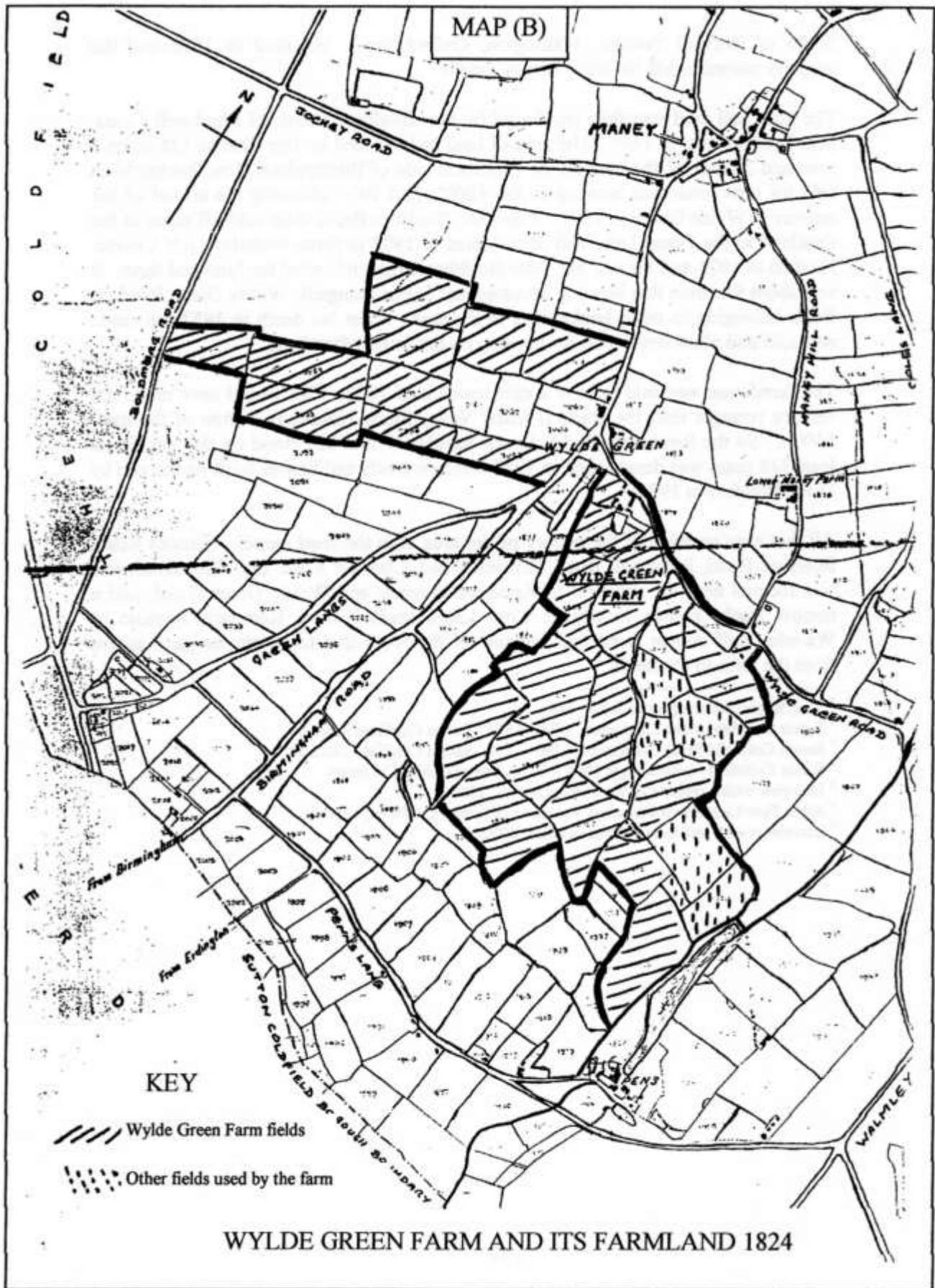
The farm appears to have been run for centuries by tenant farmers, and the owners of the land seem to have lived away from the Sutton area, treating the property as an investment. The 1790 sales catalogue shows Mr. Joseph Rolleston as the owner, the total area being 164 acres 3 roods and 3 perches in 'Wilde Green'; this included fields on both sides of Birmingham Road.

The Corn Rent Schedule of 1824, which covers every property in Sutton, gives Joseph Clark as the owner, with 191 acres and 3 perches. The Parochial Valuation of 1856 shows the acreage as 216 acres 1 rood 3 perches, the increase being partly due to allotments of land under the Enclosure of the Commons, and the owner as Mr. John





WYLDE GREEN FARMHOUSE

*Alan Howells*  
Oct 2000



KEY

-  Wylde Green Farm fields
-  Other fields used by the farm

Smith of Britwell Salome, Watlington, Oxfordshire.<sup>6</sup> He died in 1888 and the property passed to Mr. William Apsley Smith.

The farm and land was then purchased by Mr. Boulton Brook of Blackwell Court, near Bromsgrove, in 1889. The area of land had reduced by this time to 126 acres 1 rood and 2 perches, the land on the Boldmere side of Birmingham Road having been sold for new roads and housing in the 1860's and 70's following the arrival of the railway at Wylde Green in 1862. It was Mr. Boulton Brook who sold off some of the farmland at the Penns Lane end of the farm in 1902 to form Walmley Golf Course. He died in 1921 and his son Mr. John Boulton Brook inherited the land and farm. It was about this time that housing development began alongside Wylde Green Road on fields belonging to other landowners in the area. After his death in 1952 the estate was sold and plans developed for housing on the former farmland.<sup>7</sup>

The farmhouse was said to have a date inside it of 1639. This would have made it a century younger than the grade II listed Vesey Stone Houses in Sutton of the mid-1500's. So the lovely old Wylde Green farmhouse that had stood on this site for at least 328 years was demolished in 1957 and new roads and houses built on the site by Dares Builders in 1958.

All that now remains of the history of the area is in the road names — Brooks Road, Boulton Brook Road, Blackwell Road, Britwell Road, Conchar Road, etc. The farmhouse was located near the junction of Kempson Avenue and Wylde Green Road, and a narrow track, known locally as Cow Lane, leading from Kempson Avenue to Walmley golf course is all that remains of the route that for centuries gave access from the farm to the fields.

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<sup>1</sup> Lea, Roger *Steaming up to Sutton* 1984

<sup>2</sup> Sutton Coldfield Sales Catalogues, 1790—1893. Sutton Coldfield Library.

<sup>3</sup> Sutton Coldfield Sales Catalogues, 1790 —1893. Sutton Coldfield Library

<sup>4</sup> Sutton Coldfield Newscuttings 1906 — 1916. Sutton Coldfield Library

<sup>5</sup> Interview with a relative of the Throup family, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Aston Poor Law Union Parochial Valuation of Sutton Coldfield, 1856.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews with residents of Brooks Road, 2000.