

CONTENTS

	Page No.
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. BRONZE AGE, IRON AGE, ROMANS, THE DARK AGES, ANGLO-SAXONS	3
3. NORMAN CONQUEST TO 1400	7
4. 1400s (BISHOP VESEY) TO 1600	17
5. 1600 – 1800	21
6. 1800 – 1900	35
7. 1900 – 2000	47

INDEX

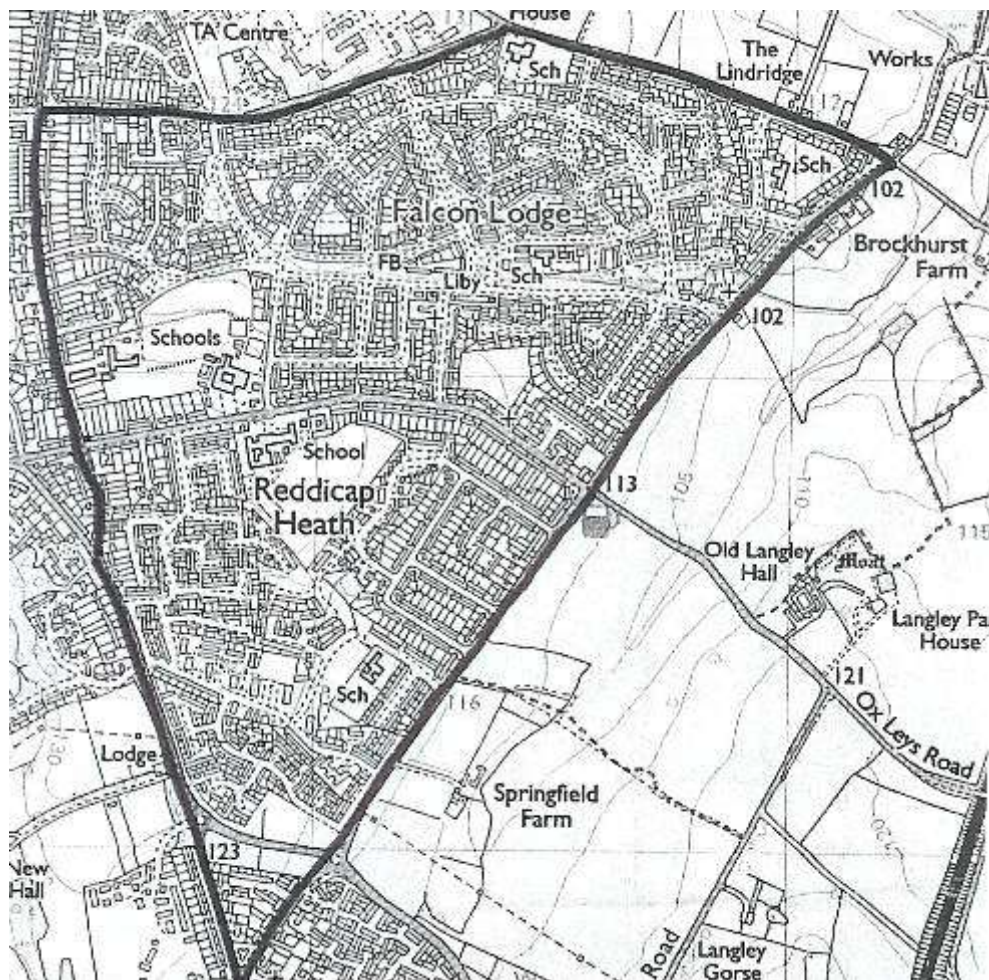
THE HISTORY OF REDDICAP HEATH

A talk to be given in Sutton Library on 11th February 2006

1. INTRODUCTION

When I embarked on this history of Reddicap Heath, I found it difficult to work out a boundary line, because it is made up of so many areas that are interesting in their own right. Places such as Falcon Lodge, Whitehouse Common, Rectory Park, Reddicap Hill, New Hall – they all encroach on Reddicap Heath and contribute to its make up. Even the crossroads has a character all of its own.

I have therefore decided to impose my own boundary and this will encompass the triangle of land bordered by Hollyfield and Walmley Roads, Springfield Road, and Rectory and Lindridge Roads. Reddicap Hill and New Hall will also be included.



MAP – A-Z (SHOWING TRIANGLE OF LAND)

You may be thinking, what possible historical importance could one attach to Reddicap Heath? Where are its signs of antiquity? It doesn't look that old. Its name doesn't even sound exciting and perhaps only conjures up visions of uninviting waste land.

Well, it may not look too promising, but its position has made it likely to be one of the most ancient of Sutton Coldfield's inhabited areas and there are plenty of historical records around these days to support that idea.

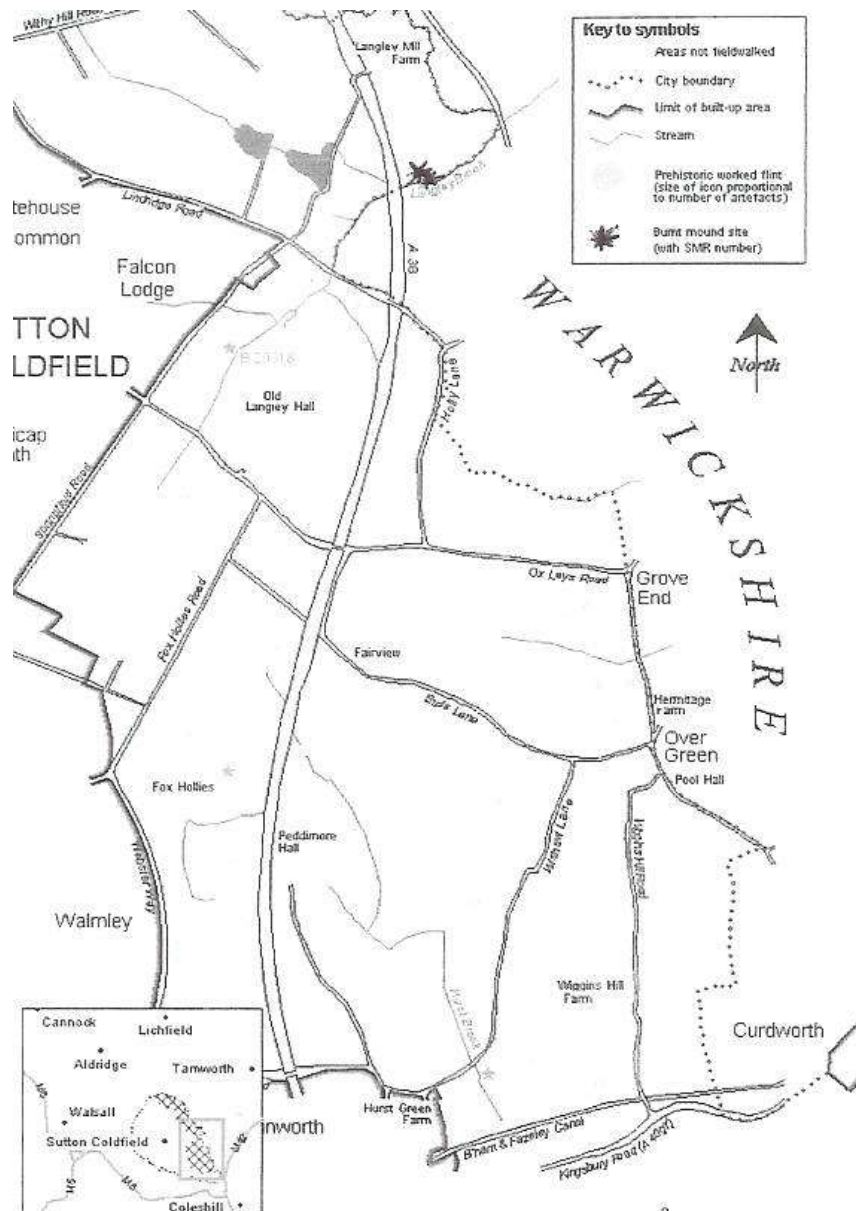
This, therefore, is my interpretation of the history of Reddicap Heath, using the sources and records open to me.

*Janet Jordan
A Member of Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group
February 2006*

2. BRONZE AGE, IRON AGE, ROMANS, THE DARK AGES, ANGLO-SAXONS

We know that thousands of years ago Sutton Coldfield, including Reddicap Heath, was part of a vast tract of land reaching right up to Cannock. It formed a huge forest¹ which would have sustained all forms of life, including man.

We know, too, that he was here in the Middle Bronze Age, because he left us with plenty of evidence. In fact, he settled just a couple of miles down the road **and** he seems to have stayed for quite a while!



MAP SHOWING EAST OF SUTTON SURVEY,

We have to thank Dr Mike Hodder, the City Council Planning Archaeologist, for this discovery. Some years ago, his team carried out a survey to the east of Sutton, prior to the commencement of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road. Many artefacts were found, particularly worked flint, confirming that in prehistoric times man really had settled here.²

Close to Langley Mill Farm, Old Langley Hall and Fox Hollies, there were some interesting pointers to Bronze Age man. Here, they found the remains of burnt mounds of heat shattered stone and charcoal. It is thought that the stones were heated in a fire and then plunged into a pit of water to produce steam for a sort of sauna-type bathing. The stones would have shattered because of the change in temperature. There have been other burnt mounds found throughout the Birmingham area.¹



PICTURE OF BURNT STONES FROM 'WALKING IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS', PAMPHLET ON SUTTON

A circular timber building, thought to be from the Bronze Age, was also found. If it were, it could be the oldest settlement so far found in Birmingham.¹

In addition, there were remains of a Farmstead from the later Iron Age and, in more recent times, the Romans left behind ditched enclosures, timber housing, tools, pottery, and even a field system.

Dr Hodder says this indicates that man settled here continuously between 1500 BC and Roman times. Because the areas surrounding Sutton were very fertile, it would have been a good place for those earlier settlers to stay and one can imagine those men foraging for their daily needs in the woods at Reddicap Heath.

Things were to change after the Romans left Britain, around 400 AD. As with many other places deserted by them, we can't say who lived here during the next few centuries, the so called 'Dark Ages'. However, some light is now appearing at the end of the tunnel and we now have records covering the more recent Anglo-Saxon times, which tell us that *Sutone* , i.e. south town or Sutton, was owned by the Mercian Kings³, who ruled from Tamworth. It is not too hard to imagine they would be drawn to the pleasures of the great forest at Sutton Chase just a short ride away.

One route open to them was, perhaps, Ox Leys Road, used by the drovers when moving their animals around the country. This led



AUTHOR'S PHOTO OF REDDICAP HILL SHOWING BANK 1992

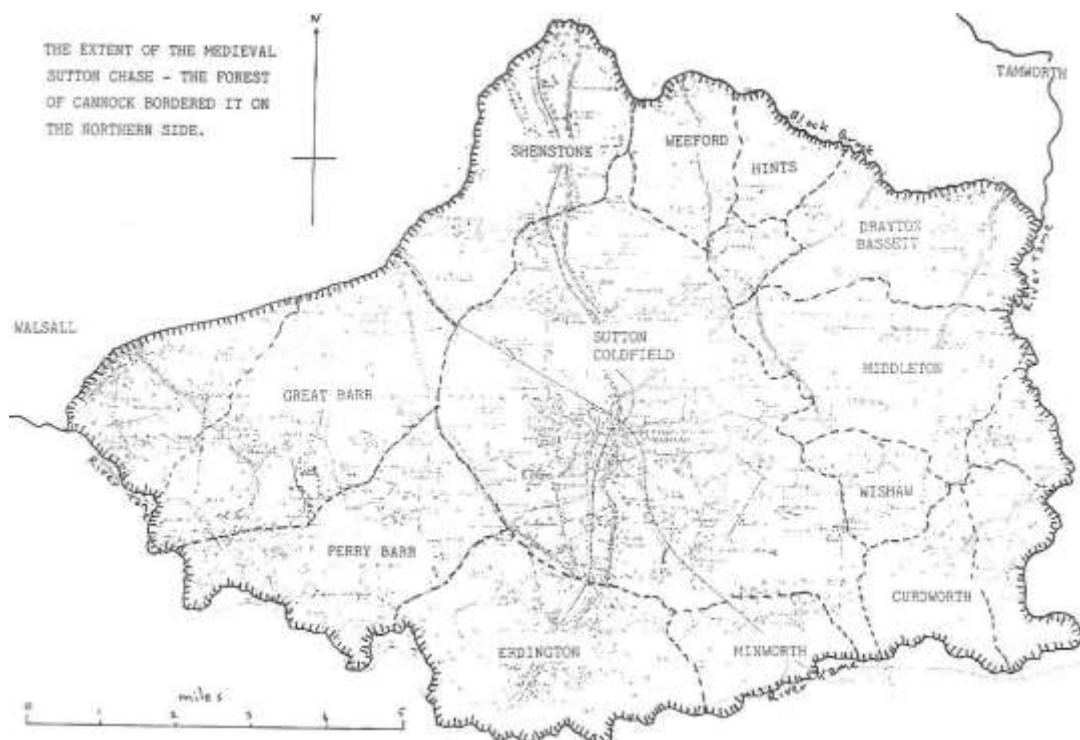
on to Reddicap Heath, over the top and down what is now Reddicap Hill, meandering its way into Sutton. Constant use of this downhill route hollowed out the sides of the path⁴, which you can see even today from the steep bank of earth behind the houses there.

NOTES

1. Unearthing relics of Sutton's distant inhabitants. *Sutton Coldfield Observer*, 24.8.2001. P4.
2. Birmingham and Warwickshire Archaeological Society Field Group: *The 'East of Sutton' Survey*.
www.bwas.swinternet.co.uk/fieldgroup/eoss.htm
3. HAYWOOD William. *The Work of The Birmingham Civic Society*, 1911. P44. BCOL20.053.
4. JONES, John Morris: *Manors of North Birmingham*, 1986, Pub. Education Dept., City of Birmingham . P13.

3. NORMAN CONQUEST TO 1400

These Mercian kings would have used their forests at Sutton Chase for 'the hunt', the sport of those times, and these would have been wonderful hunting grounds. Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, it wasn't long before future Kings and Earls based a hunting lodge at Manor Hill, now overlooking Sutton Park¹. The forest extended from today's Spaghetti Junction right over to Barr Beacon and on upwards to Shenstone. Reddicap Heath could well have been on their itinerary for a day's hunting expedition



PICTURE OF SUTTON CHASE BASED ON AGNES BRACKEN'S HISTORY - P24 OF 'SCENES FROM SUTTON'S PAST'

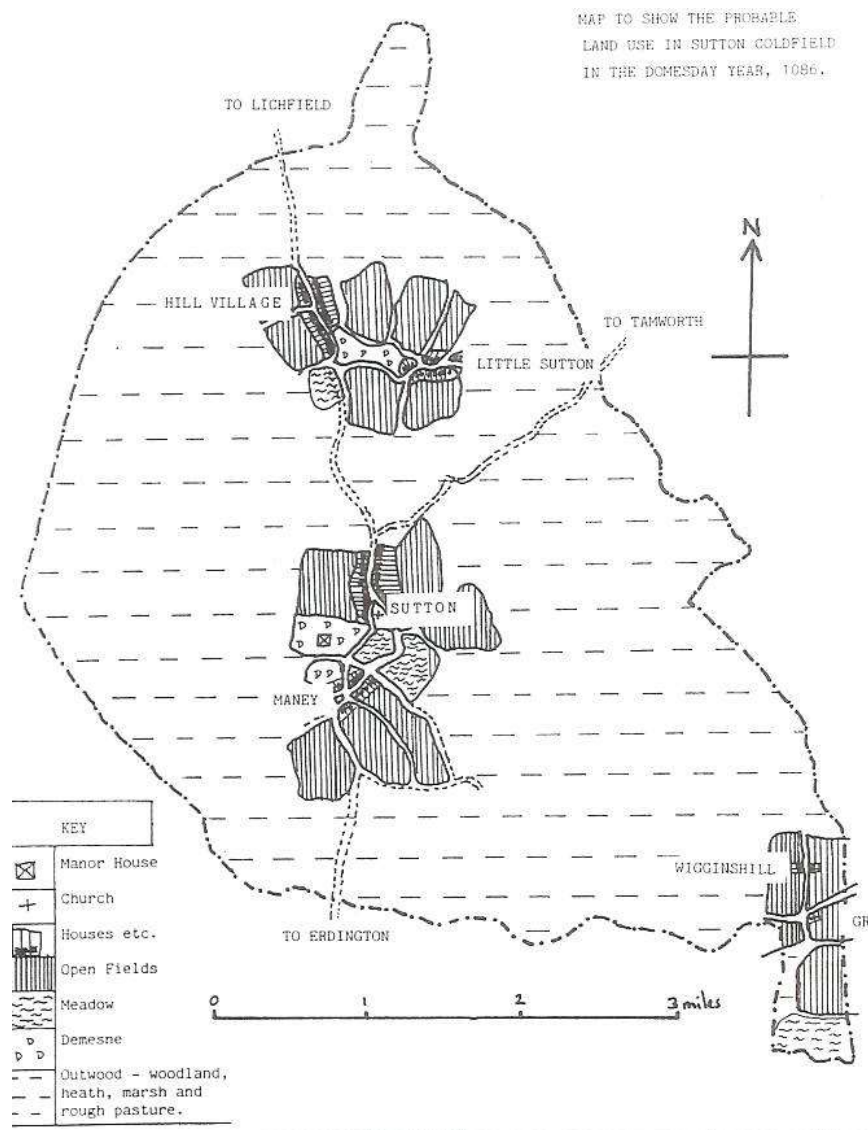
We can imagine, perhaps, the Earl, staying at his lodge overlooking the Chase in Sutton and watching the sun rising over the hill in the Reddicap Heath direction. "Today", he might have said, "we'll hunt over there". His party would mainly have been going after deer, which in those days ran in fair sized herds². To reach their destination, they would have had to skirt their way around the low lying pools in the Holland Road area, or through the boggy meadow at the foot of Reddicap Hill.



PICTURE OF FALLOW DEER – P23 OF ‘SCENES FROM SUTTON’S PAST’

Reaching the drier ground on the other side of the valley, the Earl would have known that the route up the hillside fell between two types of land. To the north, there were ‘open fields’ and to the south there was land they called the ‘outwood’. ³

He would have seen people working in these ‘open’ fields, which were divided up in such a way that the better off, such as the gentry or yeoman farmers, would own strips of land in two, or maybe three, of the fields. They would have shared the plough which was drawn by a team of oxen.⁴ The poorer tenants, the labourers, worked for them, occupying smallholdings at the edges of these fields⁵. Perhaps it was the labourers whom the Earl would have seen? Certainly, the population in the 11th Century was such that approximately 25% of the available land was being cultivated. Another 25% of the land was woodland, and the remainder, the outwood, was made up of heath, pasture, marsh and scrub⁶



ROGER LEA'S SCHEMATIC PLAN 1086, P20 OF 'SCENES FROM SUTTON'S PAST'

Reddicap Heath itself was mostly made up of this outwood, but it also had some woodland. We can surmise this because, in later years, an area around Walmley was known as "Beyond the Woods".⁷

People then had the right to graze their animals on the outwood and to gather wood for fuel from the woodland.⁸ The woodland therefore had to be cared for to produce the wood for fuel and to do this it had to be 'enclosed' or fenced in order to keep out the animals grazing on the 'outwood'⁹. This enclosed and managed land became the 'New Hall estate'.

One reason for the Earl to be drawn this way was the fact that he probably owned this estate and the existence of two particular medieval documents tends to support this.

The first, a document from 1126, records an exchange of land between King Henry 1 and the Earl of Warwick. At that time, it was actually the King who owned Sutton. In the document, **his** land was described as 'one park, one hay fenced and an outwood'.¹⁰

The 'park' would have been close to the old Manor House; the 'outwood' would have covered much of the rest of Sutton. But, it is not clear as to the whereabouts of the 'one hay fenced'. This is where the second document dated 1500, 300 years later, comes in useful. That referred to an 'Oldehaye' which, by then, was known to be part of the manor of New Hall.¹¹

It is now believed that the 'Oldehaye' is one and the same area of land as the 'one hay fenced'. That being so, it proves the Earl became owner of at least part of New Hall as early as 1126.

The term 'one hay **fenced**' means a managed woodland. It has been suggested that this hay or woodland may have occupied the whole of the New Hall Valley from Reddicap Heath Road to Pype Hayes (see reference 21).

Woodland was a valuable resource, particularly the timber trees which the Earl could sell when substantial buildings were under construction, but also the smaller coppiced wood used for fencing, furniture and all manner of tools and weapons. So it would have had a boundary to keep out cattle from the surrounding outwood, which would have loved to get in and chomp away at the new growth of young trees. The remnants of such a boundary can still be seen within the belt of trees and gardens of houses now fronting Walmley Road to the north east of New Hall¹².

These were known as bank and ditch boundaries and were formed by digging deep trenches to the outside of a bank of earth, which was topped by a fence, thus preventing the livestock from getting in¹³. Such boundaries can also be seen elsewhere, particularly in Sutton Park.



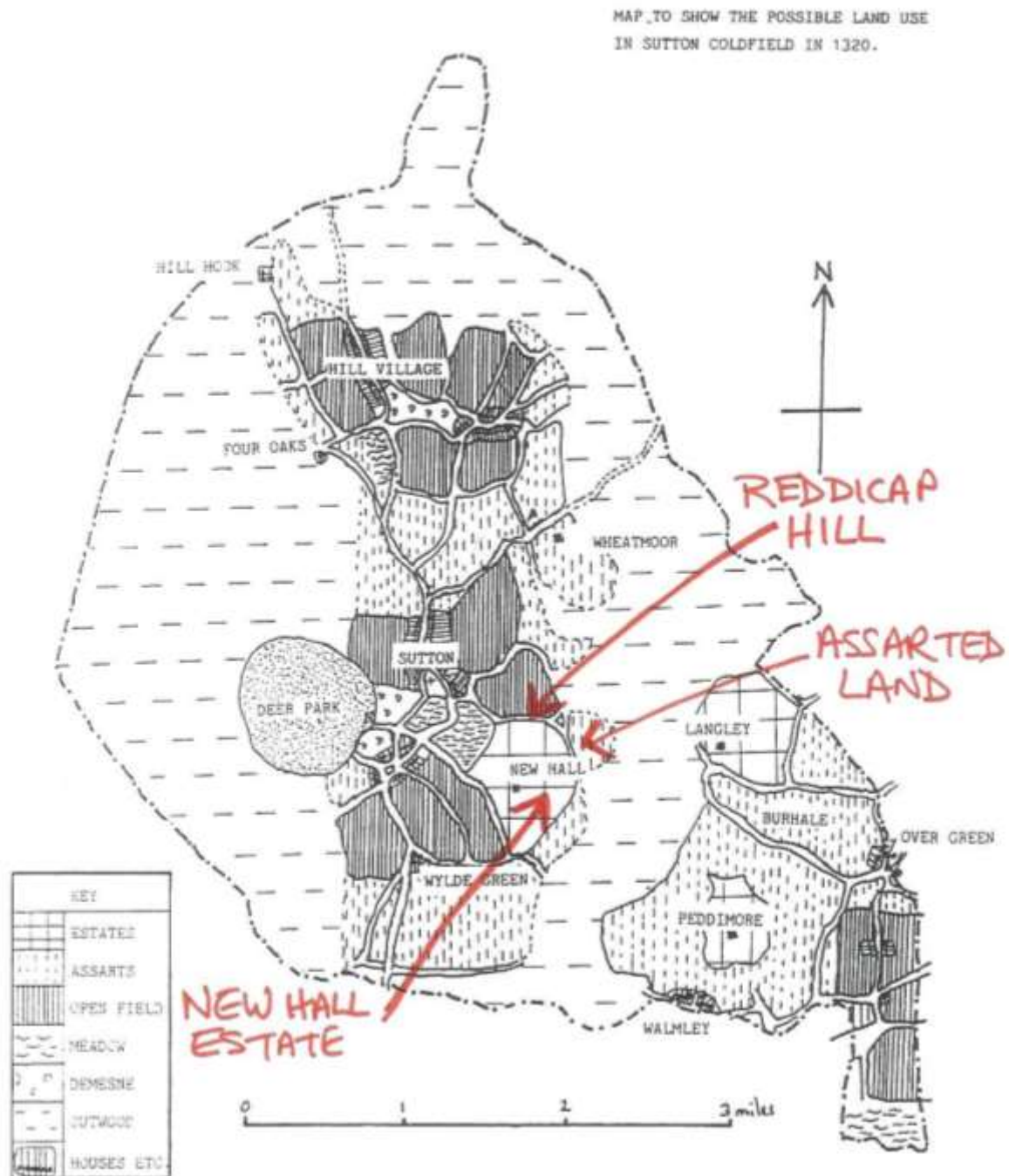
*1997 AUTHOR'S PHOTO OF BOUNDARY DITCH IN WALMLEY ROAD
(on the site of the entrance to Elm Road)*

Going back to the early Deed of Exchange with the King in 1126, ownership of the Chase of Sutton Coldfield meant that the Earl would use Sutton Manor House as his hunting lodge. As fashions changed, he moved his hunting headquarters to a prestigious moated mansion house, New Hall, parts of which can still be seen today. He could also reward his friends and allies and by granting estates such as Langley and Peddimore.

At the time, a most profitable crop was corn, fetching such a high price that before long everyone wanted to grow it. To do so, they needed extra land and had to 'acquire' or take in pieces of the outwood, or common land. This acquisition was called 'assarting'. The land was then converted into farmland - to grow the crops, raise animals, etc¹⁵ – all this corn had to be ground into flour at the mill. You could use the Earl's manorial water mill in Sutton, or maybe at his windmill near Langley Mill Farm – he had the milling monopoly.

By the 1300s, land to the east of New Hall had become a prime target for assarting and one could see the beginnings of an agricultural landscape on that part of Reddicap Heath adjacent to the present entrance to New Hall. An area between the right hand boundary of New Hall and the edges of the assarted fields

may have been left for access, probably the original route of Walmley Road. Small cottages would have appeared on the edges of these cultivated fields, heralding squatters who came to take advantage of the boom time. They would have been very welcome, providing the necessary labour and paying rent to the landowners¹⁶.



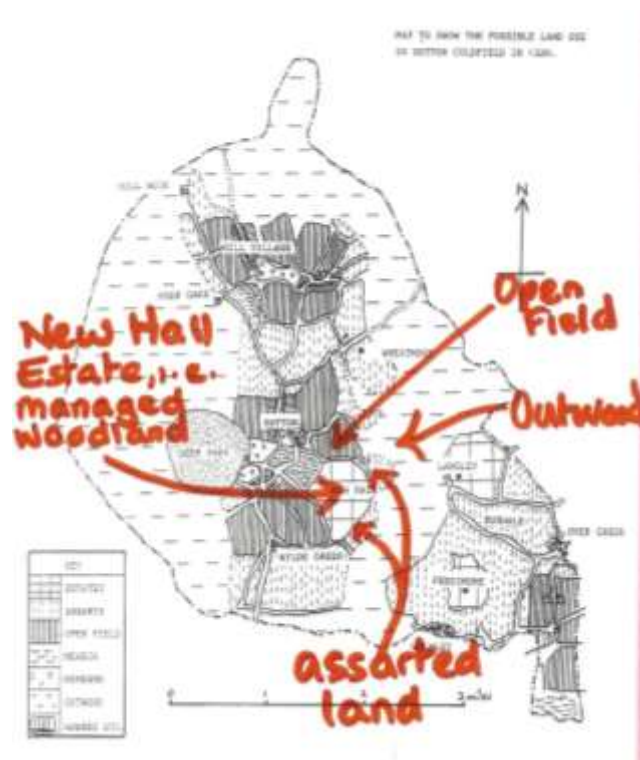
ROGER LEA'S SCHEMATIC PLAN OF 1320 SHOWING ASSARTS – P26 OF SCENES FROM SUTTON'S PAST

The population increased and a weekly market for the buying and selling, or bartering, of goods began to appear in the emerging town 2 miles away. There was also an annual fair.

A new church was built¹⁷. In those times, churches were regarded as very important social factors. They kept the communities together and people saw in them a beauty rarely witnessed in their drab lives, and those who worshipped would have done so regularly¹⁸.

Communication by road became more frequent and the basic network of roads was in existence by now.¹⁹ The names of two medieval roads, Oxleys Road and Bulls Lane, clearly show they were used for taking cattle to market. No doubt, Reddicap Heath Road was also there in its infancy, being a dirt track connecting today's Reddicap Hill with Oxleys Road and giving access to the various farms in the 'Beyond the Wood' area.

It is interesting to note the formation of four definite types of land around the centre of Reddicap Heath - the open field to the north west of Reddicap Hill, the managed woodland or estate of New Hall to the south west, the assarted land to the south east and the outwood, or common land, to the north east²⁰.

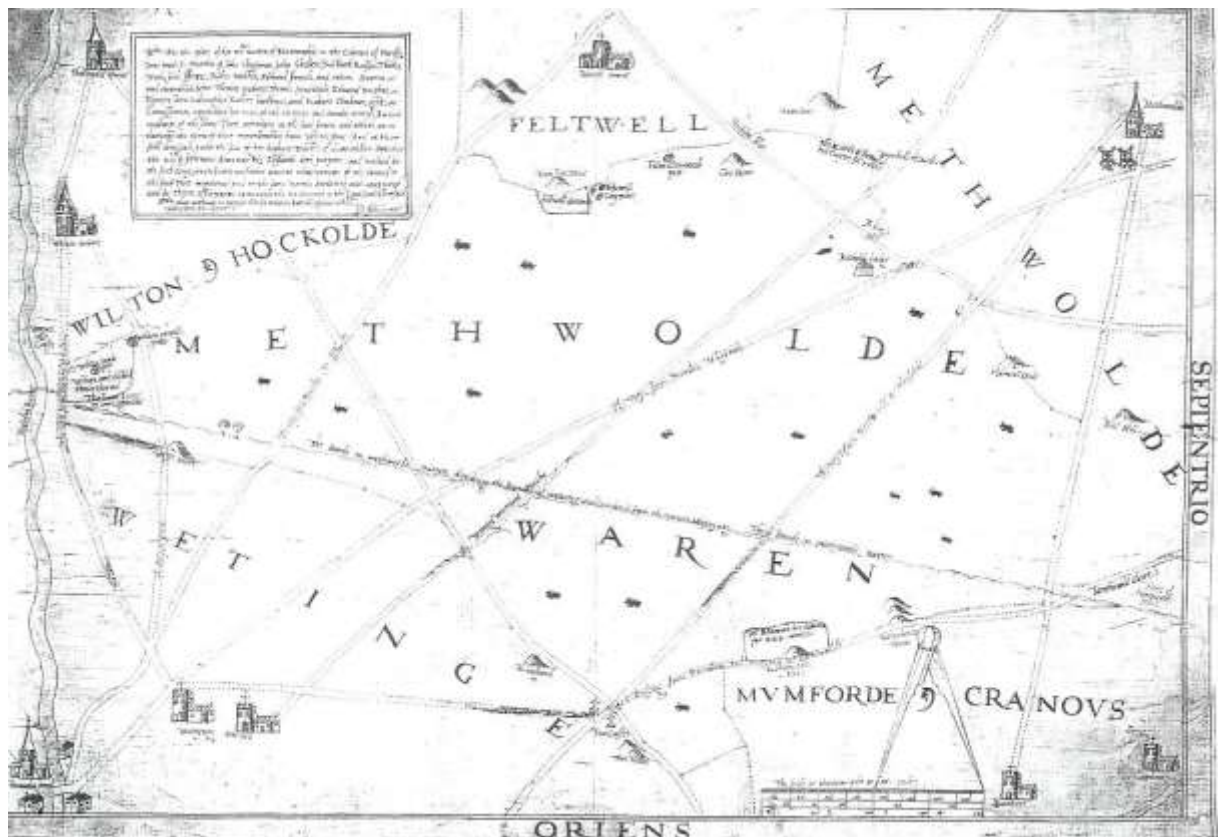


ROGER LEA'S MAP OF 1320 SHOWING FOUR TYPES OF LAND
IN SCENES FROM SUTTON'S PAST

The name of Reddicap Heath may have developed from the term 'Reddeweycoppes', which was mentioned in a Bailiff's account for Sutton. This document, prepared for the Crown²¹ in the 15th century, gave details of how much rent was owed to the King, he once again being the owner of Sutton's land. 'Reddeweycoppes' is thought to mean the 'ridding of a coppice' or a 'clearing'²² and may have come into use at the time of assarting, when the area was cleared of trees and given over to pasture for cattle and pigs, these being a much more profitable venture for the local inhabitants than wood produce.

There was another animal which became very important to New Hall and remained so, for several centuries in fact, rendering the boundary ditch between Reddicap Heath and the New Hall Estate of vital importance.

Although a pretty animal, it is regarded by us these days as a pest - it was the coney or, to you and me, the rabbit! The boundary ditches protected and contained the coneyes, which were then bred widely across the whole country.



MAP OF A CONEY WARREN IN METHWOLD, NORFOLK, OF AN AREA 4 MILES LONG, BISECTED BY A BOUNDARY DITCH AND FOOTPATHS – MAPS IN TUDOR ENGLAND BY PDA HARVEY PUB. BY THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE 1993

The name of 'Warren Farm', to the south of New Hall, provides ample evidence that they were farmed here. Coneys provided food, far more than they do today, and their pelts or skins made beautiful trimmings for clothes and also soft furry linings for hoods and shoulders of cloaks. New Hall may even have traded with other countries, who sought the rabbit fur for the latest fashions.

The actual coney catch is likely to have taken place in November. Ferrets were sent into the warrens and dogs and men waited outside. Nets were placed over the openings of the warrens and as the rabbits poured out they were clubbed to death. It had to be skilfully done, for the pelts (fur) must not be torn by broken bones. With the dogs barking and snarling, the men shouting and rabbits screaming as they died, the noise would have been horrible²³ - a necessary evil which, in those days, no doubt, one got used to.

A downside to the farming of coneys was the dreadful smell given off by the skins which had to be left out to dry in the sun and then stored in buildings until they were ready for use²⁴.

This trade, however, would have been vital in sustaining life in Sutton in the mid-14th century as it was the time of the Plague, which devastated the whole country, reducing the population by one third. What with that, cattle disease and harvest failure, Sutton fell into a severe decline. Produce fell and the weekly market ceased. As a result, the people of Sutton were to suffer greatly over the next 100 years²⁵.

NOTES

1. LEA, R. *Scenes from Sutton's Past*. Westwood Press 1989, p35
2. WILLARD, B. *The Lark and the Laurel*, Longman 1970, p67
3. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 20
4. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 21
5. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 19
6. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 20
7. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 22
8. WAGER, S.J. *Woods, Wolds and Groves*. Sutton Coldfield Library
BCOL.Q333.75094248. p69
9. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 21
10. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 22
11. WAGER, S.J. *Woods, Wolds and Groves*. Sutton Coldfield Library
BCOL.Q333.75094248. p67
12. HODDER, M. *The Development of some aspects of settlement and land
use in Sutton Chase*. Book 2, fig 98 and page 256. Sutton Library QSH
60.10
13. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 22
14. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 25
15. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 25
16. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 27
17. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 25
18. JORDAN, J. *The Roman Catholic Church in Walmley*. Holy Cross & St
Francis RC Church 1993
19. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 25
20. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 26 (plan)
21. POWELL, AM/LEA, R. *Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group.
Proceedings Vol 5, Fifteenth Century Sutton from the Bailiff's Account*,
Sutton Coldfield Library
22. HODDER, M. *The Development*
23. WILLARD, Barbara, *The Lark & The Laurel*. Macdonald & Co
(Publishers) Ltd 1987, p 71-73
24. WILLARD, B. *The Lark and the Laurel*, Longman 1970, p33
25. LEA, R. *Scenes*, p 20

4. 1400s (BISHOP VESEY) to 1600

But they had to struggle on, well into the 1400s. Another reason for Sutton's doldrums were the exploits of Richard Neville, the then Earl of Warwick, who had devastated the woodland by taking timber to pay for his army fighting for the King¹. This Earl was so powerful that he could influence who would be the next King. In fact, they called him 'the Kingmaker'. When he died at the battle of Barnet in 1471, the King took over Sutton² once again and he was not particularly interested in a place that had been left so impoverished.

However, by the early 1500s things had started to recover and they were to improve further when Bishop John Vesey, Sutton's great benefactor came on the scene.

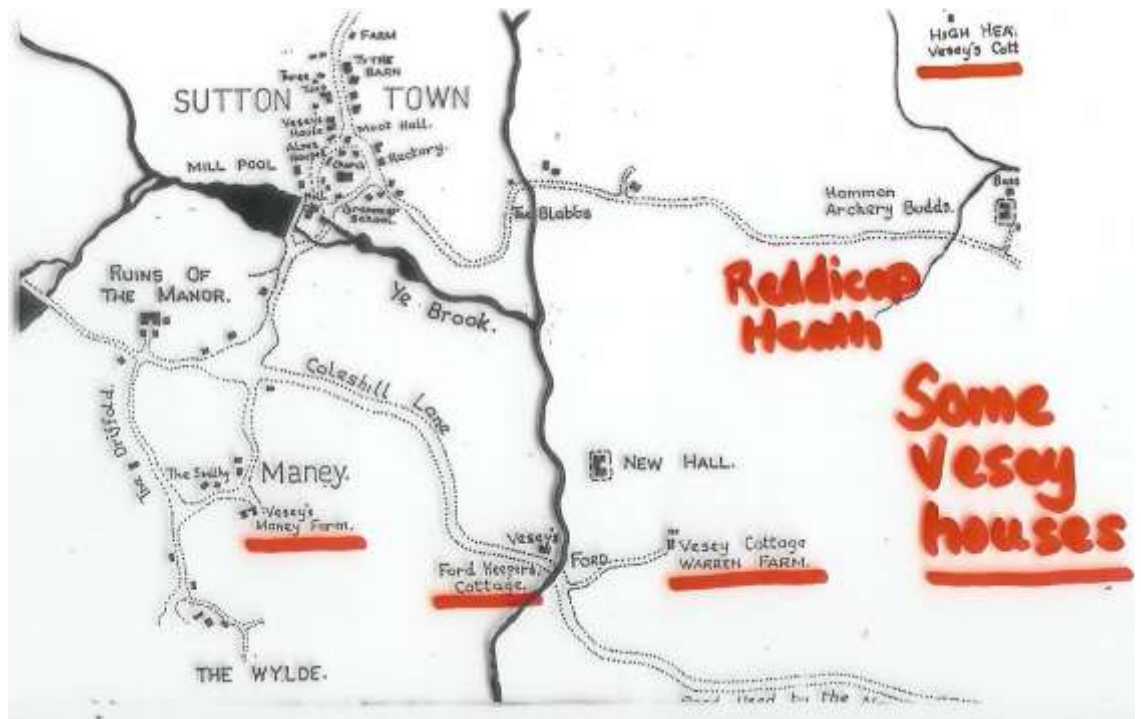
Vesey had grown up in Sutton, but his illustrious career had taken him elsewhere during his early years. Visiting home one day, he was shocked by the state of the place. Fortunately, he had attained a high position in King Henry VIII's court, which enabled him to ask favours of the King.

He obtained a charter in 1528 for Sutton to govern **itself** and an organisation known as The Warden and Society was set up with the necessary powers to enable it to carry this out.

In addition, Vesey's immense fortune gave him the means to found a school, repair roads and establish a police force. He provided funds to build stone houses throughout the whole area and it is thought there were 51 built in total. These were possibly intended for workers in a new woollen industry he introduced called Kersey weaving, producing items that had proved very profitable in Exeter, where he was the current Bishop³.

Unfortunately, the venture did not succeed in Sutton, but the houses were strongly built and their occupants were soon to feel the benefit of revenue produced in the town by the newly created Warden & Society³. Some of the houses remain to this day and, in this area, the well known one to the south of Reddicap Heath is Warren Farm, just off the Walmley Road, bearing all the Vesey hallmarks, particularly a stone spiral staircase⁴.

We have evidence of other cottages in the area, now demolished, which could also have been Vesey's houses; or they may have



MAP AT THE TIME OF BISHOP VESEY (1530) IN SUTTON LIBRARY SHOWING RUINS OF MANOR, VESEY HOUSES AND NEW HALL

been built by The Warden & Society for the poor of the parish. They could equally have been built by enterprising newcomers of the day, keen to take advantage of another benefit offered by Bishop Vesey's charter. This gave everyone the chance to pay rent for and cultivate at least 60 acres of common land at 2d per acre - provided they built their new houses there⁵. The idea was to encourage growth and stimulate progress. Obviously, the best land went first and Reddicap Heath had some of Sutton's most fertile and productive. The new housing boom heralded a swift rise in the population of Reddicap Heath.

This scheme, however, didn't last long because members of the Warden & Society, who had control of the commons, abused their powers by taking the best land packages for themselves. The poor suffered because, in some areas, they could no longer graze their cattle or use the land for access⁶. A new system was therefore needed which would accommodate everyone, the rich and poor alike.

The system was called 'Lot Acres', whereby common land was selected by the Warden & Society. A lottery was then taken amongst the inhabited households, who held their 'lot' for 4 years, after which it would revert to common land again and new

lots would be taken. During this time, some people would cultivate their lot; others might let it out, for example, to a neighbour - or they might not bother with it at all. This system was to last for over 200 years - until the general enclosure of land introduced into the country in the 1800s⁷.

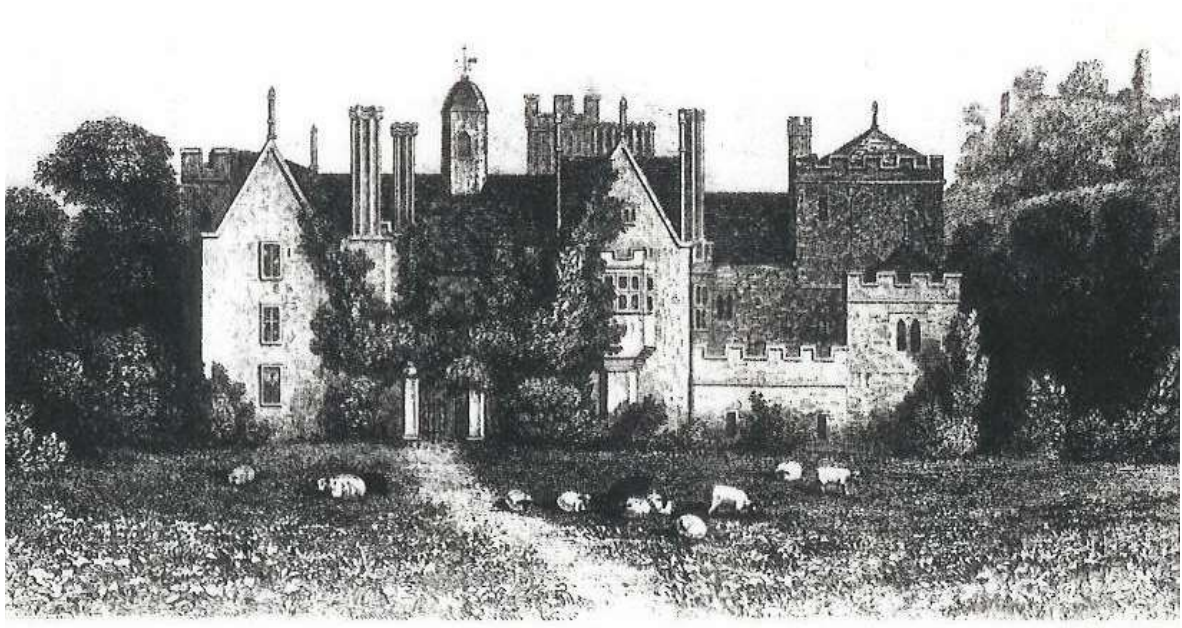
The New Hall Estate perhaps also benefited from this opportunity of acquiring more land. A document of 1586, describes the area as:-

'a capital messuage called 'Newe Hall'... together with dovehouse, gardens, orchard, barns, stables and hopyard, fishing and pooles, and one close called stoney wards, one close called prowde field, one close called broadfield, one meadow called New stock meadow, one close called barn close, one meadow called milne meadow, one close called wheatacre and one great close called deary close'

The document also mentioned that it had:

'40 couple of conies and 40 loads of firewood'

This was a large estate! The rent due in 1500 was £75 per year⁸. - about £15,000 today⁹.



OLD PICTURE OF NEW HALL (1700S) FROM SUTTON LIBRARY

As with other large houses of the times, it would have been self sufficient. People living there would have been sustained by their animals, which were kept for food, milk and for working the land. Corn and wheat would have been harvested for flour. There would have been plenty of hay and straw, and cheap litter from the woods. Heather would be used for bedding, and straw to re-fill mattresses each year. Old rushes would have been cleared and burnt and then strewn on the hall floors, and you would have seen hams and haunches of venison hanging from the canopy of the big fireplace in the hall to smoke. They might have had a pigeon loft, and New Hall definitely had a dovecote and a stewpond containing fish. Butter would have been churned, herbs dried and eggs preserved. Strong ale was brewed from hops, wine from elderberry and cowslip, mead from honey and perhaps nettle beer.

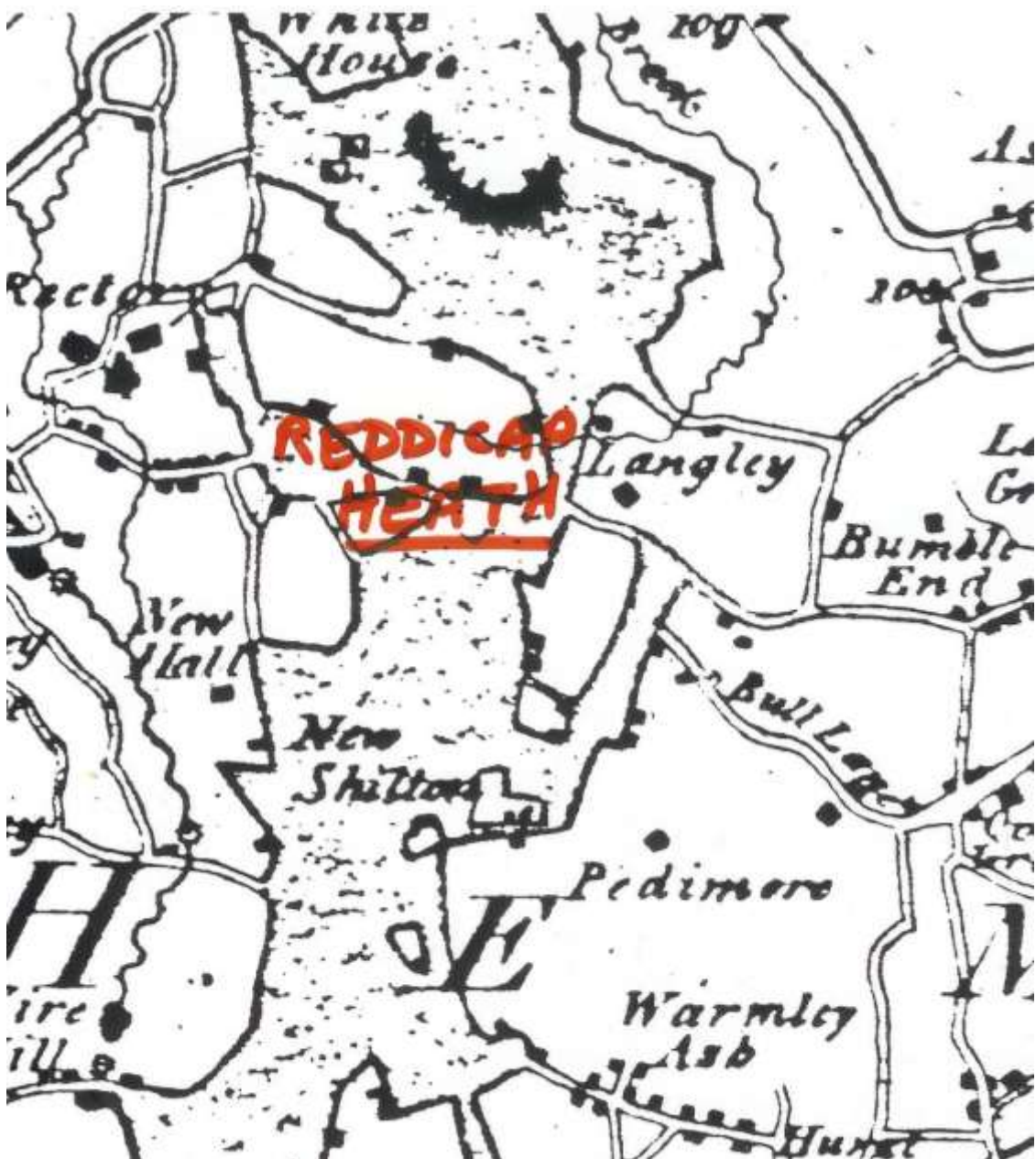
The coney, of course, New Hall had in abundance and there was probably a surfeit of potted rabbit, which would be made by making a paste of the meat, spicing it well, covering it with a thick layer of lard and then sealing it in jars.¹⁰ This, perhaps, provided a welcome gift for some of their poorer neighbours!

NOTES

1. LEA, Roger, *Scenes from Sutton's Past*. Sutton Library, p29
2. OSBOURNE, K. *A History of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School (The First 375 Years)*, Sutton Library, p2
3. RILAND BEDFORD, Rev WK, *Three Hundred Years of a Family Living*, 1889, Sutton Library, p17
4. CHATWIN, PB and HARCOURT, EG. *The Bishop Vesey Houses and Other Buildings of Sutton Coldfield*. Sutton Library.
5. LEA, R. *The Story of Sutton Coldfield*, Sutton Publishing Limited 2003, p89.
6. LEA, RM. *The Quarters of Sutton*, Sutton Library (QSH 63.9).
7. RILAND BEDFORD, Rev WK, *Three Hundred Years of a Family Living*, 1889, Sutton Library, p40
8. NEW HALL, *LEASE dated 1586*, Thomas Gibbons to Percival Willoughby. Sutton Library.
9. The Bank of England Equivalent Contemporary Values at Oct 2000
10. WILLARD, Barbara, *The Lark & The Laurel*. Macdonald & Co (Publishers) Ltd 1987, p 71-73

5. 1600 - 1800

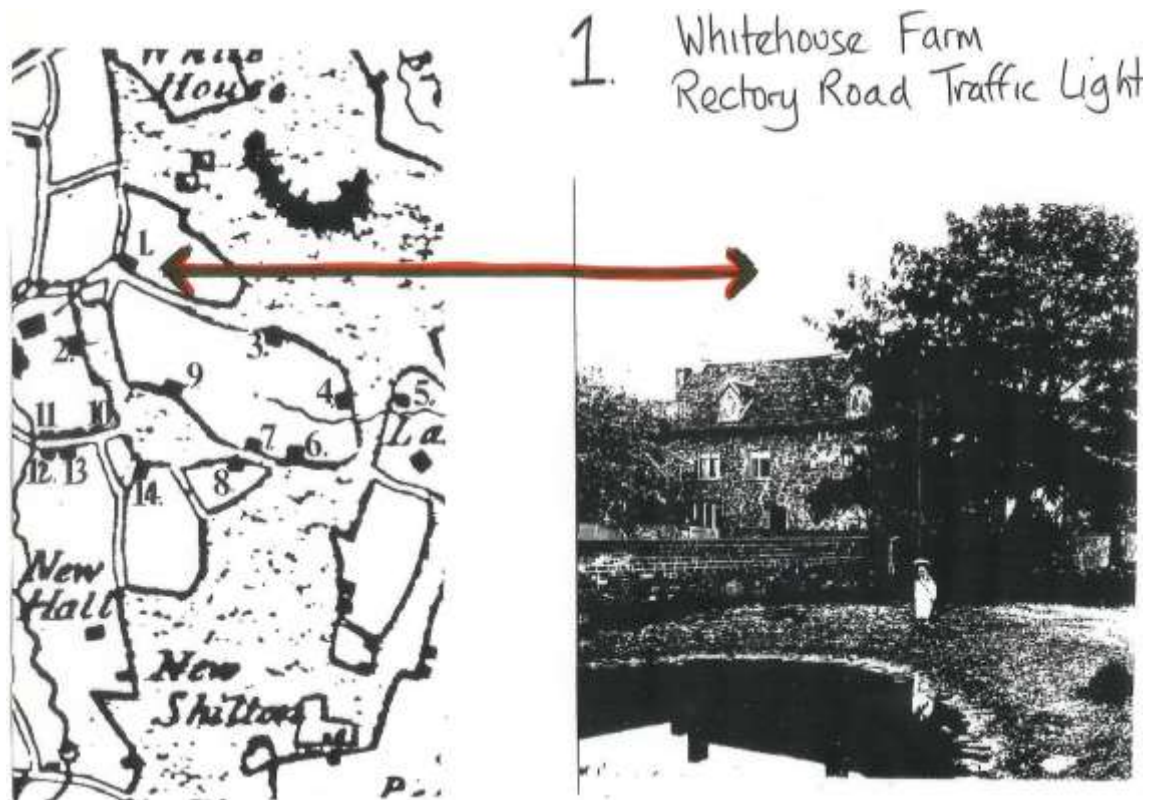
We know where many of New Hall's neighbours lived by looking at William Yates' Map of Warwickshire of 1793¹. It shows settlements as black 'squares', commons as dotted areas and open fields as blank areas. The early dwellings were built at the edge of these open fields overlooking the commons, thus making them easily reached without the need for building access roads.



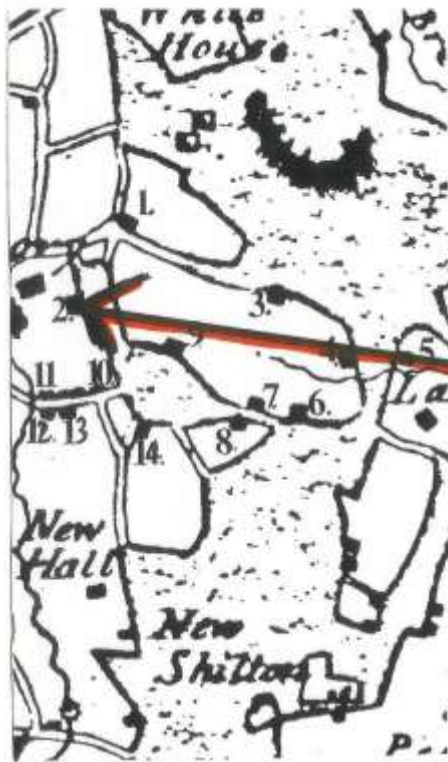
YATES MAP 1793 (FROM SUTTON LIBRARY)

Looking at these black squares on Yates' Map, we can try to associate them with houses about which information is readily available. I have numbered them 1 to 14,

Number 1 - White House Farm at the crossing of Rectory Road and Whitehouse Common Road is said to have been built in the 1600s². It had red sandstone rubble walls, a feature of old Sutton Coldfield cottages and was still there in the early 1900s.



Number 2 - Hollyfield House in Hollyfield Road, near St Chad's Church, was originally called New House when it was built around the late 1700s³. It survived until the 1950s. One of its owners was a well known Sutton family, the Addenbrookes, who today are connected with Addenbrookes Hospital.

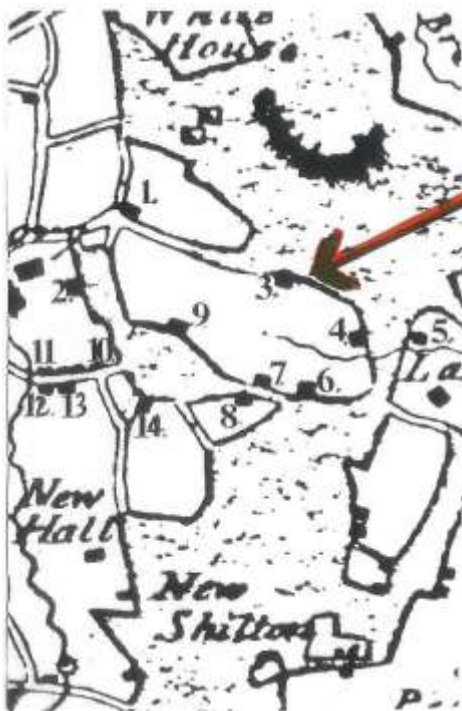


2. Hollyfield House,
Hollyfield Road



HOLLYFIELD HOUSE (PHOTO FROM SUTTON LIBRARY)

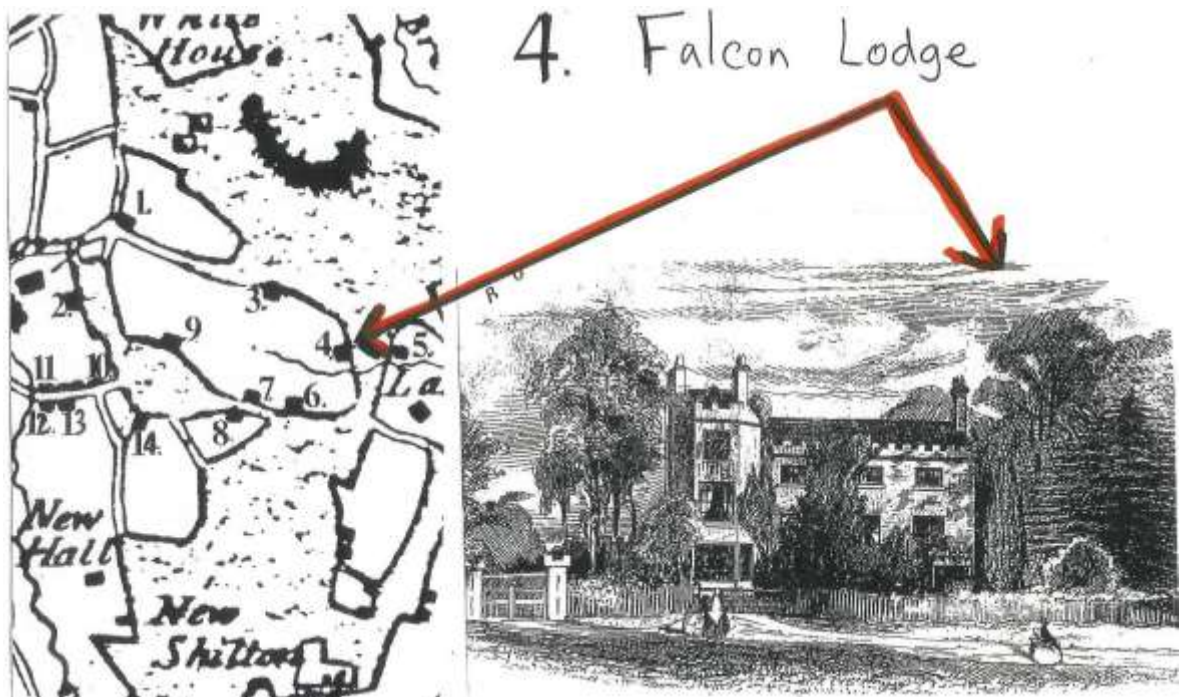
Number 3 - At one time called **Ingle Neuk** and, sometimes, Greaves Farm. This has now been replaced by a school where Lindridge Road and Rectory Road meet⁴.



3. Site of
"Ingle Neuk" and,
possibly, "Greaves
Farm".
(corner of Rectory Road
and Lindridge Road)

INGLENEUK

Number 4 - The site of **Falcon Lodge** which was built somewhere around the 1820 and demolished around the 1940s⁵. There may have been farm buildings here even before the Lodge was built.



FALCON LODGE (PICTURE FROM SUTTON LIBRARY)

Number 5 The site of **Moorland Cottages** at the far end of Springfield Road. For some years, there was a 'Soma House' here, but now this area is occupied by new blocks of flats.



MOORLAND COTTAGES

Number 6 is a cottage owned by the Warden & Society in 1857⁶, but it is not certain who lived there and **Number 7** is also a cottage owned by Warden & Society but this particular one was not on the 1857 Valuation Map, so had possibly gone by then. It may only have been a small hovel.



6. and 7.

Cottages owned by
The Warden &
Society. Not much
known about them

MYSTERY COTTAGES

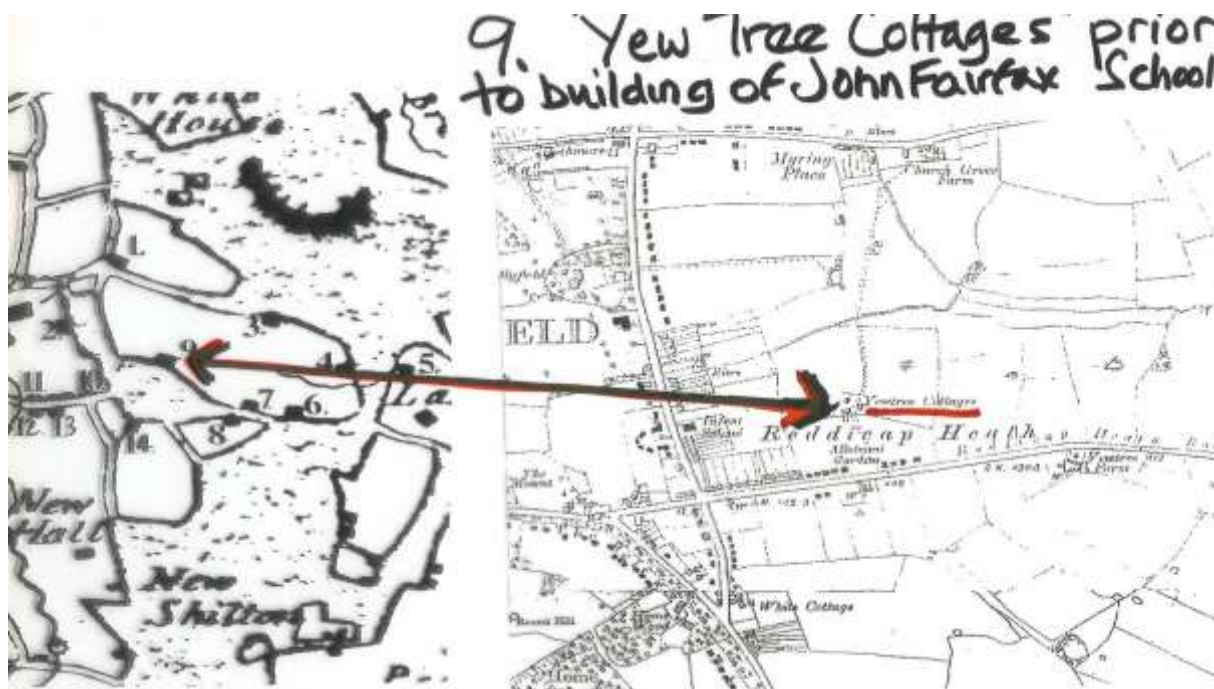
Number 8 - Yew Tree Farm, a new name for the old Hawkesnest, was half way down Reddicap Heath Road. In 1811 it was owned by the Rector⁷ and was only knocked down to make way for housing in the 1950s.

8. Yew Tree Farm
(formerly "The Hawkesnest")
in Reddicap Heath Road



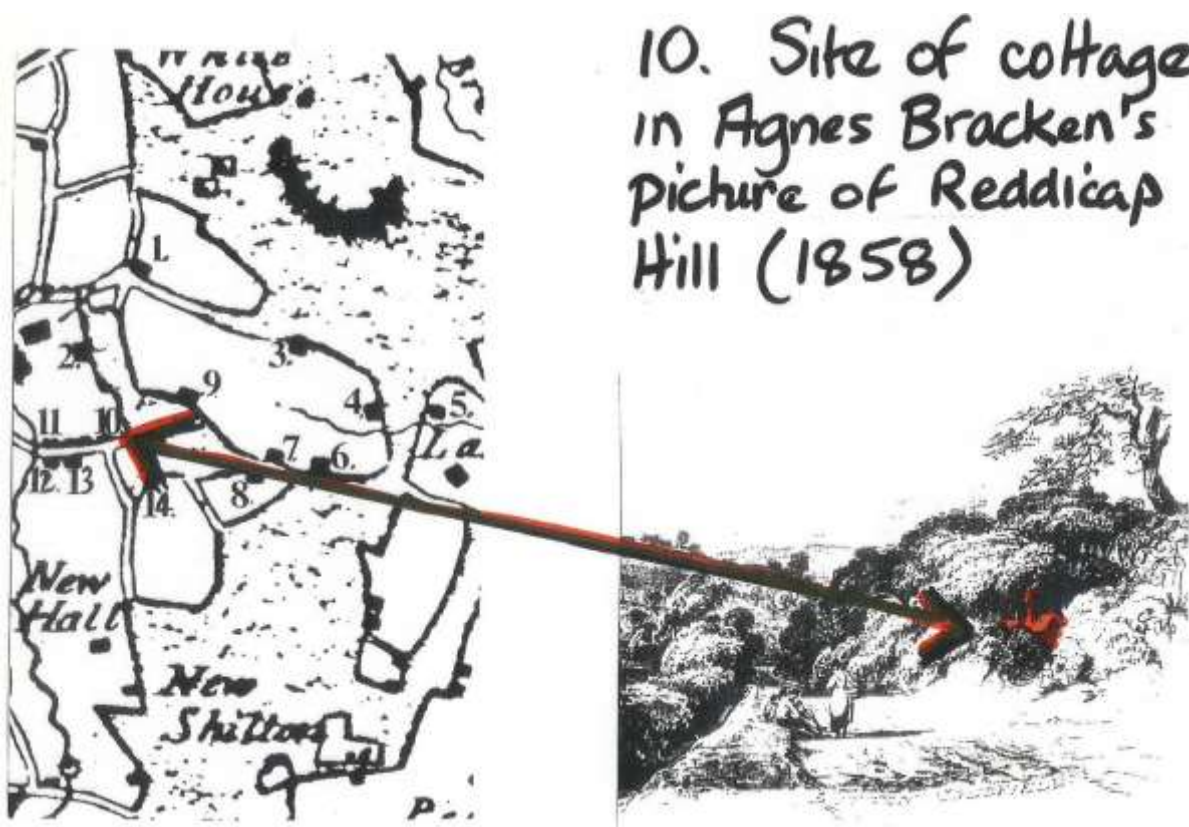
YEW TREE FARM (PHOTO FROM SUTTON LIBRARY)

Number 9. Yew Tree Cottages were likewise knocked down in 1950s, this time to make way for John Fairfax School.



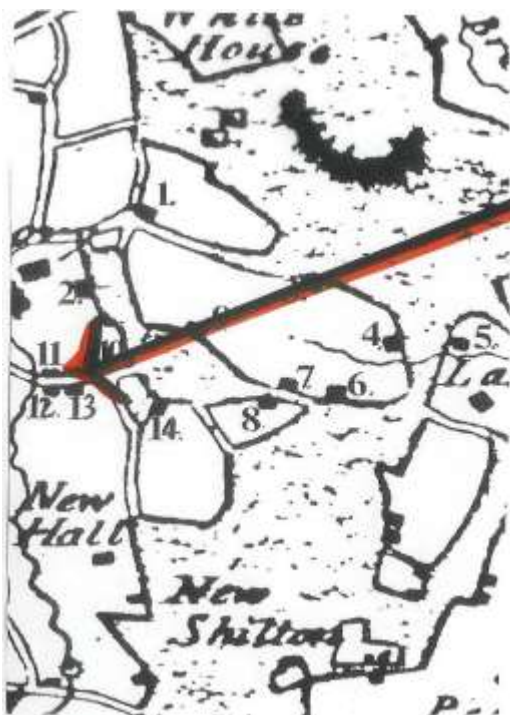
YEW TREE COTTAGES

Number 10 is the site of an old cottage in Agnes Bracken's sketch of Reddicap Hill of 1858⁸



AGNES BRACKENS SKETCH OF REDDICAP HILL (SUTTON LIBRARY)

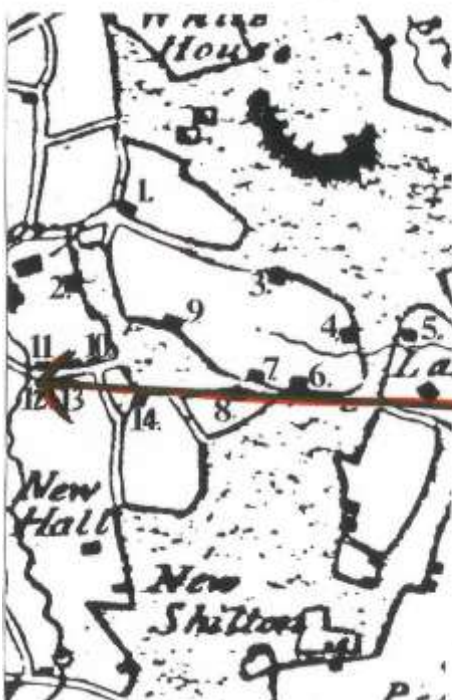
Number 11 This settlement at the bottom of Reddicap Hill on the Trading Estate side no longer appears after Yates' map and very little is known of it.



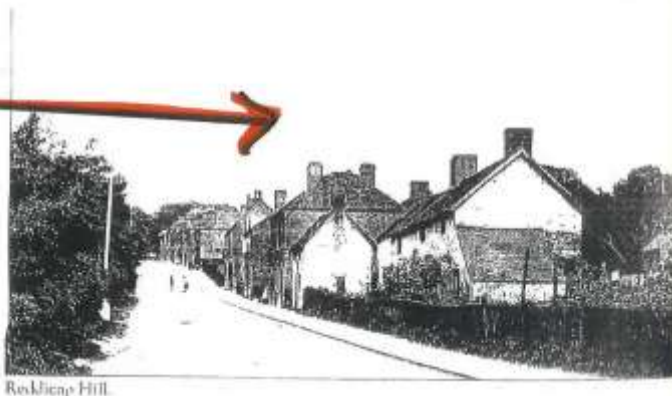
11. Cottages in Reddicap Hill. No evidence of owners.

COTTAGES AT BOTTOM OF REDDICAP HILL

Number 12 This white painted Cottage at bottom of Hill and hovel was still there in early 1900s.

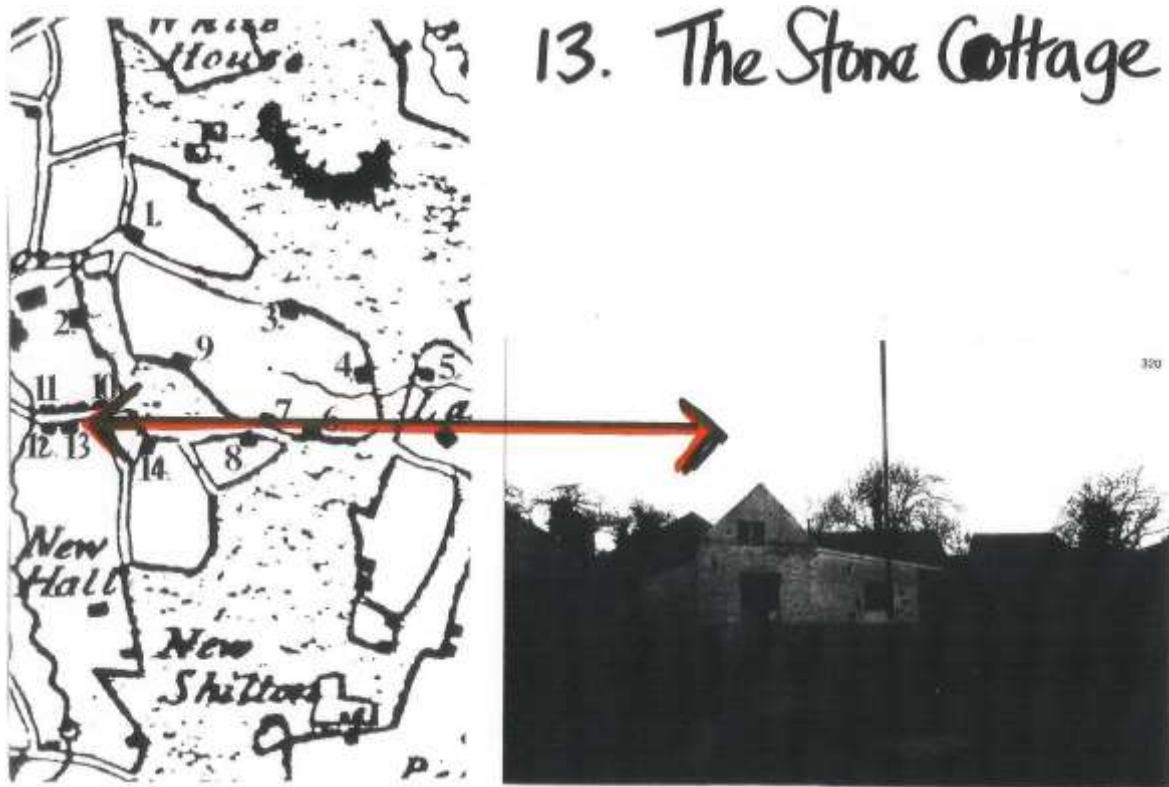


12. White painted Cottage at foot of Reddicap Hill (and hovel)



WHITE PAINTED COTTAGE AT BOTTOM OF HILL (PHOTO GIVEN TO AUTHOR BY ADAMS' FAMILY)

Number 13 - The Stone Cottage, built around the 1780s⁹ is still there today, trading as the Co-op Funeral Parlour.



THE STONE COTTAGE – (PHOTO FROM KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)

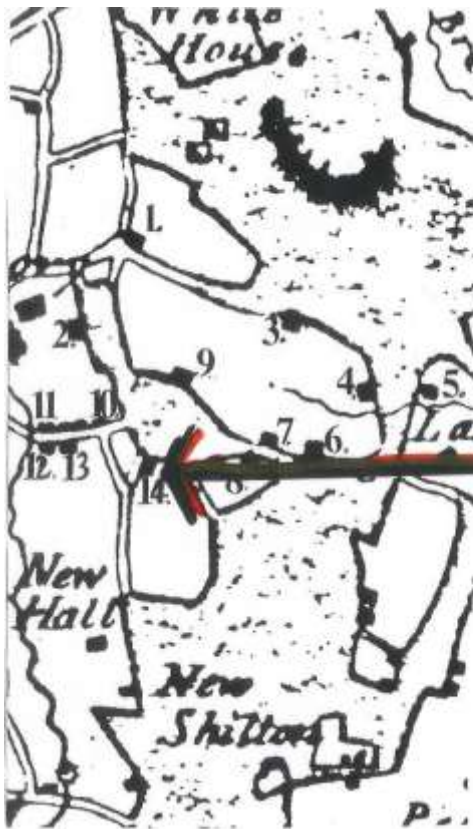
In 1811, these last few and others on the Hill, were owned by the Corporation (Warden & Society) and were let out to the poor.⁷

Land at the bottom of the Hill was very boggy, due to the convergence of two streams, one from the park and one from Tamworth Road, and for this reason was probably never used for grazing sheep and cattle¹⁰. It was known as "The Blabs" or "The Blobs", named after the 'Mollyblobs'¹¹ (ie the Marsh Marigolds or Buttercups) which grew there in abundance. One of the fields was called Swan Meadow, another indication of how wet it was in those days.¹²

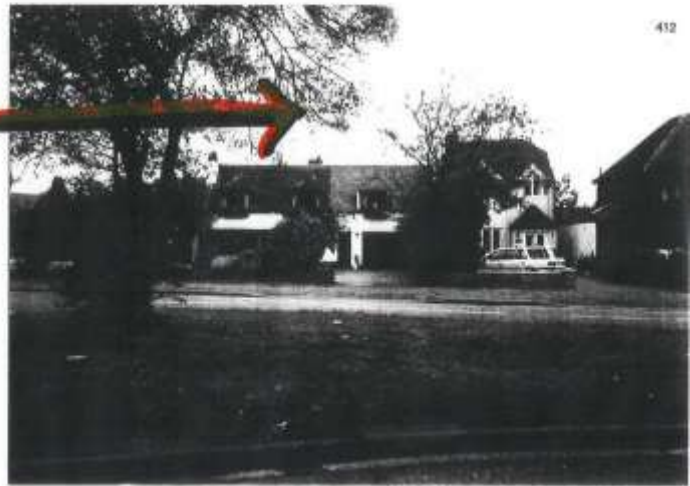
As you travelled up the hill, however, the land was much better. This area became known as "Rad Way Cop"¹³ and consisted some of the poorer element of the 298 houses known to be in Sutton Coldfield in 1630¹⁴.

And finally -

Number 14 - The White House Cottage No 460 Walmley Road.
This is still there and may be one of the oldest cottages in the area apart from The Stone Cottage.



14.
The White Cottage,
Walmley Road



THE WHITE HOUSE COTTAGE (PHOTO FROM KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)

As with the other sites, the people who lived here would have worked for the landowners on the open fields. They would have eked out their living from the commons, grazing their animals, using the timber and turf for fuel and taking whatever else they could make use of¹⁵.

But, for others in the 1600s, such as the gentry and yeoman farmers, things were improving and this was reflected in the Taxes of the day. For example, a Tax for Ship-money in 1636 shows Sutton paying £80 with Birmingham paying just slightly more at £100¹⁶.

Another Tax, the Hearth Tax, levied on every house, provides a starting point from which to judge the expansion in population. A List of Householders in Sutton Coldfield showed a total of 314 houses in 1674. Fifty years later there were 46 more - 12 of them having been built in the Reddicap Heath area¹⁷, possibly cottages built for the poor. The inhabitants, such as the Bassetts,

Whorwoods and Jacksons, were receiving money from one of the local Charities in the early 1700s¹⁸, and continued to qualify for parish relief for many years, never seeming to get out of the poverty trap.

The land owners and farmers, however, could afford to grow crops, such as wheat, rye, barley, pease, corn, oats and hay. No doubt they made use of the water mill now installed at New Hall, driven by the River Ebrook running through its valley. Some years later, entrance gates were erected on the Walmley Road - no doubt flaunting its new found prosperity¹⁹!

New Hall may have had another role, as a place for religious worship. A mystery building in the grounds of New Hall, now bricked up, bears all the hallmarks of a medieval chapel²⁰. Unless the building is opened up again, we can never be certain this was the case, but this would have been much easier to reach than Holy Trinity Church in the town, which was quite a trek from some of the outlying areas of Reddicap Heath.

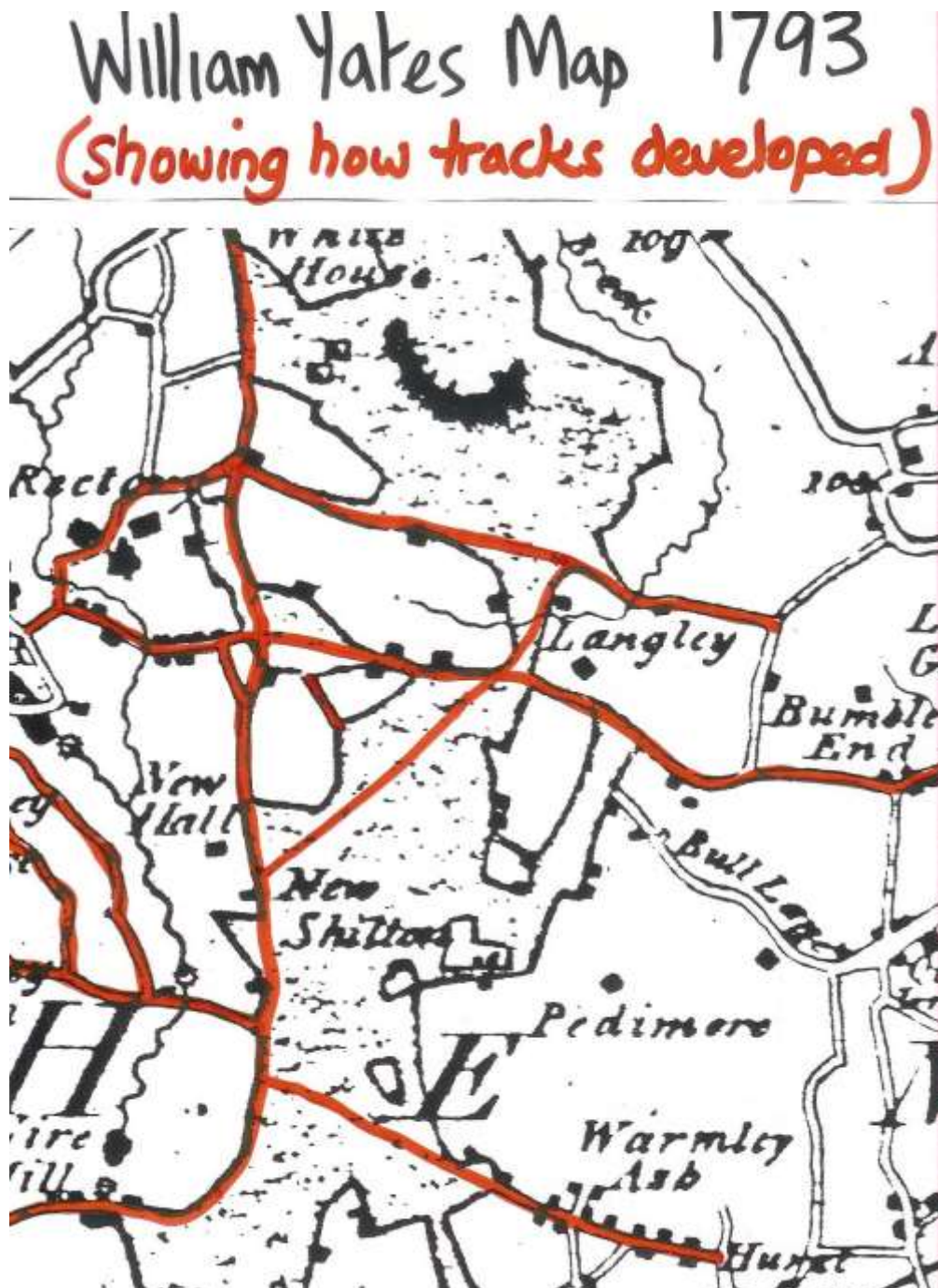


"Chapel" at New Hall

'THE CHAPEL' AT NEW HALL (PHOTO FROM KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION) 1990s

Travelling anywhere during these times was pretty arduous. Most main ways were just dirt tracks, used by wheeled vehicles or by animals being taken to market or moved between fields. They

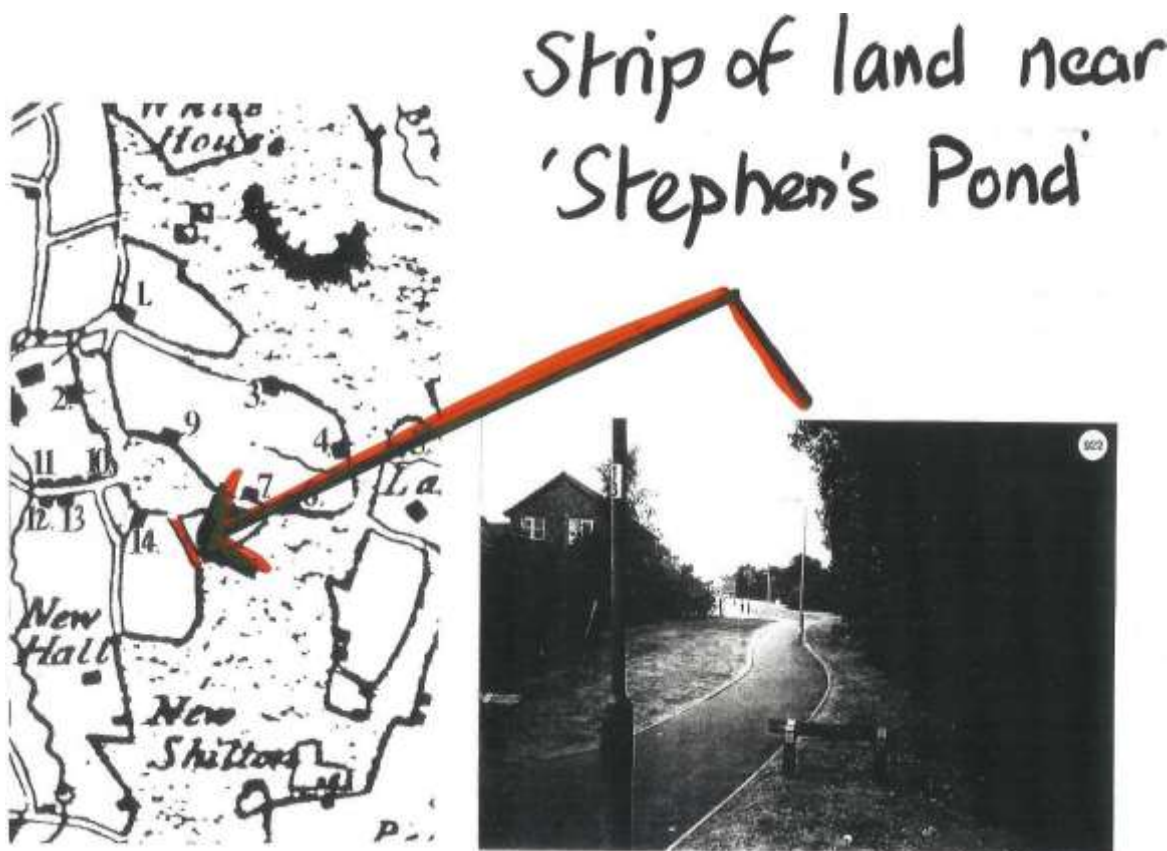
were dry and dusty in the summer and wet and rutted in the winter. You can see how some of these tracks developed from the long strips on Yates' Map. They skirted the boundary of New Hall Estate, made use of the gaps between fields, and meandered over the commons, giving access to the outlying farms, such as those at Yew Tree Farm, Langley Farm and maybe Falcon Lodge.



YATES MAP 1793 (MAP FROM SUTTON LIBRARY)

It's easy to see where current day roads originated, such as Reddicap Heath Road, Hollyfield Road South, Hollyfield Road, Rectory Road, and even the track bisecting the two great fields of Reddicap Heath and linking the commons remains in a truncated form these days¹.

A walk across the Heath in those days would seem a bit unreal to us today. There was no traffic to shatter the peace - perhaps only a far off clatter of passing horsemen or wagons. Of course, you'd hear the birds and the gurgling of nearby streams, but otherwise the amazing quiet all around would seem very strange. A night time walk would have been quite an experience. Moonlight was a godsend but, if it were cloudy, all you might see would be the glimmer of distant rushlights or candles flickering in the windows of the cottages. In those days, there were no night watchmen on Reddicap Heath to light lamps or check on the houses as there was in Sutton town!



ROAD NEAR STEPHEN'S POND – (PHOTO FROM KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)

You would find, though, that people were much more likely to stop and pass the time of day with you. Old people, of course, like to reminisce and one farmer, William Twamley, who worked in the

area recalls a conversation with Sarah Brown, an old lady who lived at a house on Redicap Heath, as he called it. She could remember a couple of hangings that she'd been to on the commons, one in 1728 at Little Sutton Common (now Fox Hill) and one in 1729 on Sutton Coldfield Common (afterwards called Gibbett Hill).²¹

Large gatherings were few and far between. A farmer might host a celebration for his workers if there was a good harvest, but generally, you wouldn't meet many strangers unless you went to the occasional Fair, held in the town for the buying and selling of goods.

Life had been like this for years and years, but things were about to change for everyone at the end of the 1700s and agriculture was to feature largely in the future prospects of Reddicap Heath.

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9. JORDAN, Janet, *The Old Stone Cottage, Reddicap Hill* (BCOLQ728.370942496JOR)
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6. 1800 - 1900

To get an idea of the local rural scene in the early 1800s, one only has to look at the well known painting called *February Fildyke* by Benjamin Williams Leader.



*FEBRUARY FILDYKE BY BENJAMIN WILLIAMS LEADER
(FROM BIRMINGHAM ART GALLERY)*

By this time, Reddicap Heath was littered with this type of cottage and we have a good idea who lived in them from the Survey of Charity Estates that was taken in 1811¹.

2. 1811 SURVEY OF CHARITY ESTATES

BEN WOODWARD JUN.

BEN WOODWARD SEN.

JOS. WHITTAKER

JOHN PAGE

CHARLES ADAMS.

REDICOP LANE

WIDOW BIRD THOMAS HUGHES

tenants	Acres	Perches	Wharfedale	Rent	Yearly value
William Hughes	1	House garden &c.	4 10 0	48	2 10 0
Thomas Hughes	2 2	House garden &c.	5	50	3
William Bird	3	House	4		2
Charles Adams	4	House field & garden	10		2 2
	1	Orchard & garden	9 0 0		1 0
			3 2		3 6
John Page	2 4	House garden	20		1 10
John Whittaker	6 0	House garden	1 0		3
Ben Woodward	1 1/2	House barn garden orchard & yard	1 0		1

1811 SURVEY OF CHARITY ESTATES,
PICTURE OF REDICOP LANE (FROM SUTTON REFERENCE LIBRARY)

These people were, effectively, Council tenants living in Council houses owned by the Warden & Society. They were known as 'the poor'. For example, at the bottom of Reddicap Hill, or Redicop Lane as it was still known, lived the Hughes Family and Widow Bird. Further up were the families of Charles Adams, John Page, Joseph Whittacre and Ben Woodward, and near to the Reddicap Heath crossroads, there was Elizabeth Taylor, another widow. Opposite her, at the far end of a small field lived William Simmonds.

Going across the heath Robert Thompson lived at 'Hawkesnest Cottage' and James Arnold and Edward Bassett lived side by side overlooking Mr Bassetts' Field. Moorland Cottage, on the periphery, was Joseph Starkey home and it is interesting to note that this is where Andrew Hackett, a local landowner, kept his hunting dogs.

So, these were the 'poor' families who made use of the commons and waste. They had their own little piece of garden or croft, for which they paid rent to the Warden & Society. Some had their own pigsty, cow house or stable, or even an orchard, and most of the men worked as agricultural labourers for the local landowners

One of the largest landowners was the Warden & Society who controlled the common and waste land. Others included the Pudseys who owned Whitehouse Farm, Chas Cooper of Hollyfield House, the Chadwicks at New Hall, and Andrew Hackett at Moor Hall.²

For many years, these big landowners had been advocating a new system of land management. Countrywide, it stemmed from an urgent need to feed the rapidly rising population at that time, generated by the industrial revolution. More land had to be brought under cultivation and managed far more effectively than before.

The system was called 'Enclosure' and it worked like this. Land was taken from the commons and waste and divided up, or allotted, amongst the current landowners, proportionate to the amount they already owned, so the more one had, the more one got.

In practice, the large landowner who was allotted common land, which happened to be right beside his own private field, was delighted because it immediately increased his acreage and he could invest in the latest farming methods. Even if his allotment was much further away, he could still exchange it with someone of the same standing, to their mutual benefit.

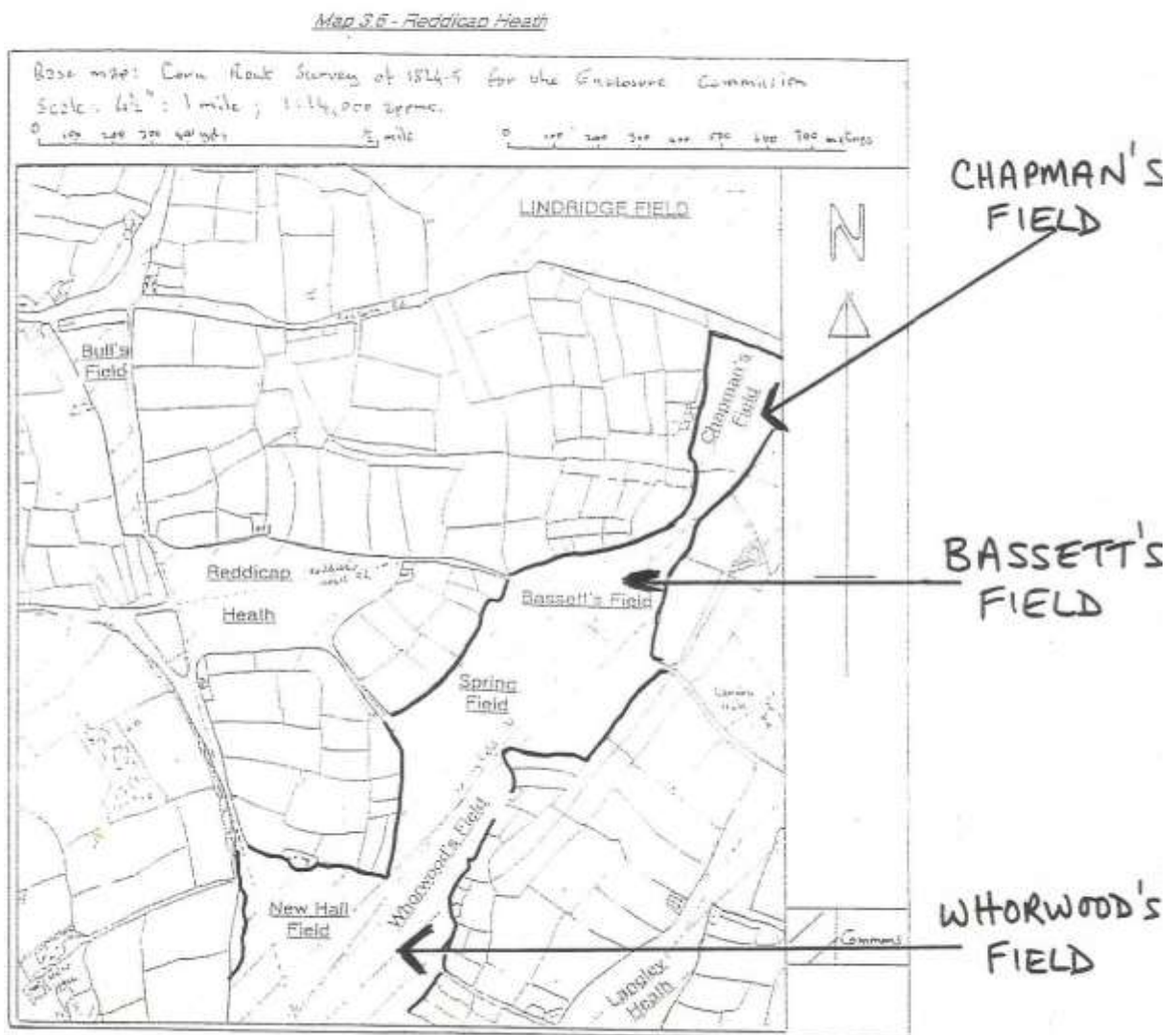
Unfortunately, everyone had to finance the 'enclosing' of their allotment by way of fencing or hedging, and the cost of this proved quite a burden on the smaller, less wealthy, landowner. As his allotment was much smaller, it was potentially much less profitable and thus more difficult to exchange for a piece of land more beneficial to him.

However, he was still better off than the tenant or labourer, who not only received nothing but lost his rights over the commons, which had been given away, and, anyway, it was reckoned that the commons had become so impoverished that they were no longer viable³⁺⁴. The tenant was supposed to gain from being able to work on the bigger, improved farms, but it never quite worked out quite like that.

Sutton Coldfield was actually long overdue in adopting this system, but it came into force here in 1824 by an Act of Parliament called 'The Enclosure Act'.

However, it was not until 1851 that the Award, allotting all this land, was carried out. Large areas of common at Reddicap Heath disappeared at this time. Old fields named after families who had lived and worked there, such as Chapman's Field, Bassett's Field and Whorwood's Field – all of these were shared amongst the landowners – and it was about now that Reddicap Heath Road was laid out, incorporating what was formerly known as 'Thompson's Lane'⁵ (probably named after Robert Thompson of Hawkesnest Cottages).

PRE - 1824 ENCLOSURE

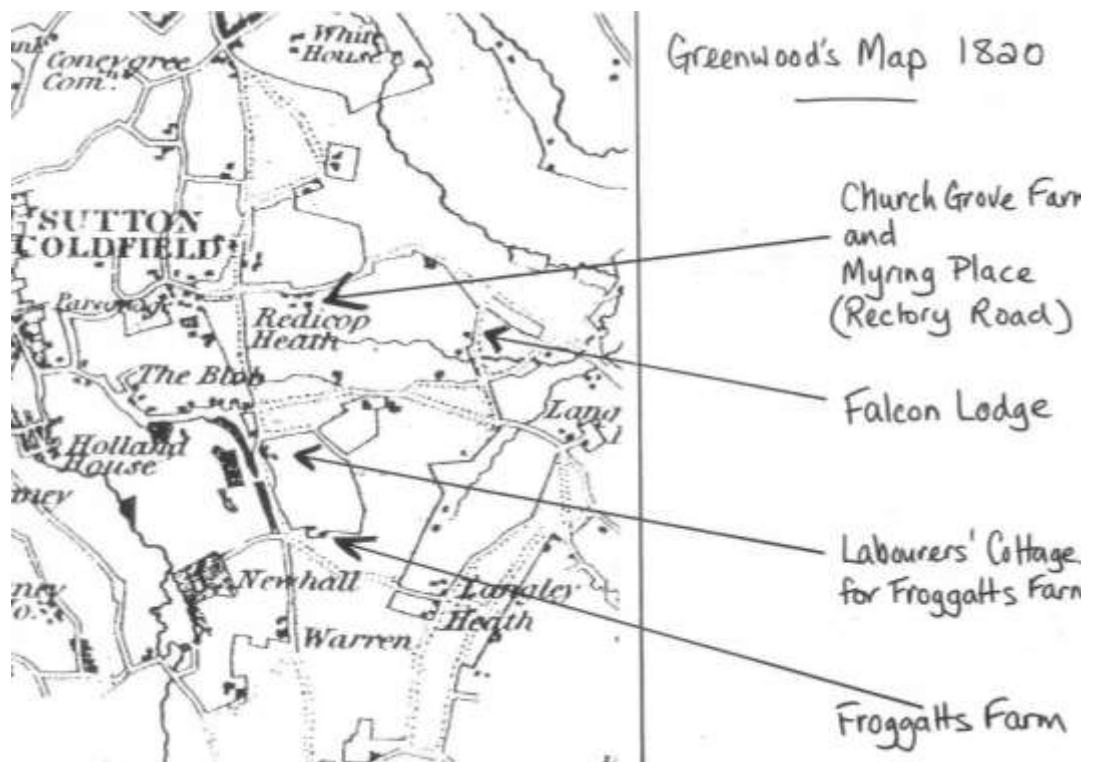


from 'The Lands to be Enclosed' by Roger Lea

PRE-1824 ENCLOSURE - ROGER LEA'S MAP

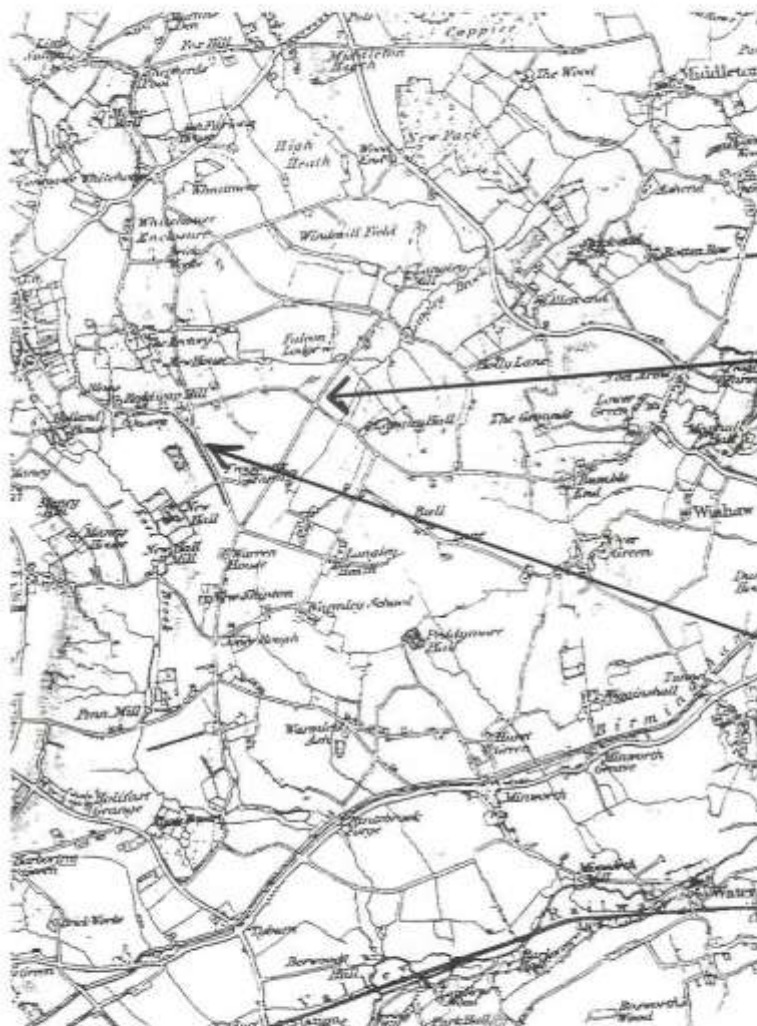
At the same time, the cultivated, or open, private fields were continuing to expand naturally, as a result of landowners nibbling away at the commons and 'acquiring' little bits here and there. By the 1820s there were already new farms and cottages on the

edges of these fields, such as Timothy Wood's Church Grove Farm in Rectory Road (with Myring Place nearby providing homes for his farm labourers) and William Smith's Froggatts Farm near New Hall – his labourers' cottages bordered onto today's Walmley Road⁶. Mr Pepper's beautiful crenellated house at Falcon Lodge appeared on the scene in the 1820s hoping to benefit from the new system, as, indeed, did all the farms.



GREENWOOD'S MAP 1820 (FROM SUTTON REFERENCE LIBRARY)

After the Enclosure Act many new roads came into existence. There was no need for curves, they were built straight as a die - Springfield Road being a good example. Other roads, such as Rectory Road and Lindridge Road were properly laid out and Walmley Road was edged with a plantation of trees known as 'The Belt' on the Newhall boundary.⁷⁺⁸



Springfield Rd

Walmley Road
with its
belt of trees.

1834 O.S. 1st Edition

1834 O.S. 1st EDITION – (FROM SUTTON REFERENCE LIBRARY)

It seems, at least in Reddicap Heath, that Enclosure improved the life of the agricultural labourer. There was plenty of work for him on the farms which had expanded and for other skilled workers too - carpenters, cabinet makers, blacksmiths, bricklayers and gardeners – they were all vital for general maintenance⁹

While the farms were doing well, other local needs were not being overlooked, schooling and housing being prime examples.

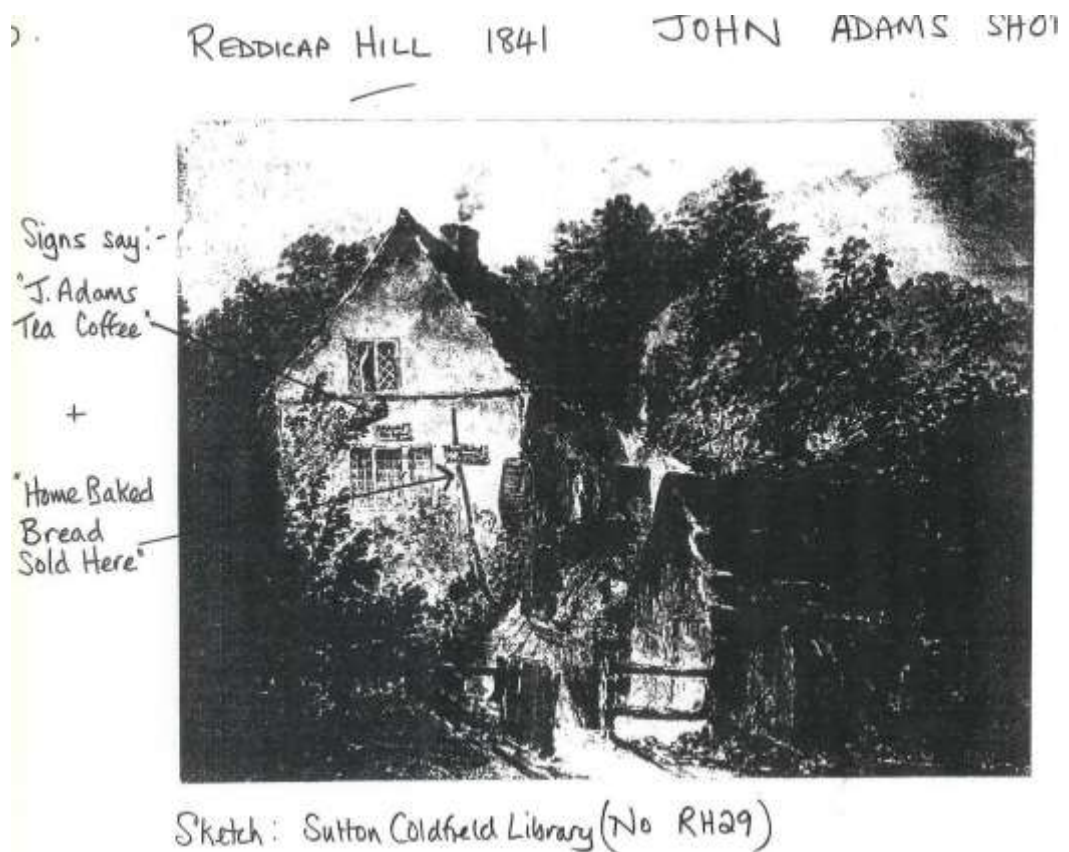
Good education for most children in Reddicap Heath had been provided for by the Corporation since 1825. Boys and girls went to the Town School at the bottom of Trinity Hill between the ages of 6 and 11. If they completed 5 years there, they were lucky (or not, depending on how the children viewed the 'moral and religious instruction' they were supposed to receive!)¹⁰

Most of them, of course, had to help out at home. There might be gardening to be done or rearing of poultry, rabbits or pigeons. Some looked after the family pig, a most important job!. In fact, when the man came round in pig killing week - quite a gruesome time, with all the squealing and blood everywhere - a well fattened, healthy pig greatly improved the family's diet and income until the next kill.

The children who lived on the smaller farms would be expected to help in the dairy, milking the cows, making butter or cheese and maybe doing a bit of fruit picking, but they would look forward to the haymaking season and Fair Days in the Town - both very joyful occasions, with much fun for all.

One of the Town School boys, Charles Adams, who lived in Reddicap Hill, probably had to help at home. Perhaps this is why he didn't do too well at school, being reported as 'Undeserving' due to his poor School record which said he had been "absent 132½ days, sick 103 days and late 151 days" - this was between 1840 and 1845¹¹ - but he it was who later in the century became extremely successful at building, providing much needed housing in the area.

When he started school, his parents were renting a cottage from the Corporation, which is now owned by the Co-op Funeral Directors. The Adams Family were the first known grocers in Reddicap Hill, selling tea, coffee and home baked bread. Business went well for them and, 30 years later, Charles himself was running the shop.



REDDICAP HILL 1841 – JOHN ADAMS' SHOP (SUTTON REFERENCE LIBRARY)

With his profits, he took leases of land from the Corporation, and began with a new house-cum-shop for himself. He then embarked on a building programme up and down Reddicap Hill over the next 10 years. When he died in 1915 'Adams Stores' was still going strong and he had become a wealthy man. In his Will, he left his house and shop, bake house, stabling, cowshed, cow stocks, furniture, plate, linen, books, pictures, horses, carts and harness – and over 50 houses which he owned in and around Sutton.¹²



REDDICAP HILL 1900 – CHARLES ADAMS' STORES (PHOTO FROM KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)

His houses in Reddicap Hill fronted directly on to the street. Some had small gardens at the rear, which is where you would find the 'privy' and coal store. Most houses were quite small, having a living room downstairs with a separate washhouse and boiler, and a couple of small bedrooms upstairs, but they must have been fairly well built as almost all of them still exist today.¹³

Charles wasn't the first to build on Reddicap Hill. John Lilly, a gentleman outfitter who traded in New Street, Birmingham, had already built his dream house on the pinnacle of the Hill overlooking the valley towards Maney. When he brought his wife to 'The Mount' in 1878, it was a majestic Victorian house with a turret and lots of rooms, including a Chinese room, six bedrooms, a boiler room and a butler's pantry. He also put up a couple of houses further down the hill, believed to be for his servants.¹⁴



'THE MOUNT'(PHOTO FROM KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)

The new railway line from Birmingham to Sutton had made it easy for him to work in the town but to live out in the pleasant suburbs. Others were now realising this and very soon new dwellings appeared round about; a little shop on the site of the

present 'Reddicap Pub', one or two bungalows further down Reddicap Heath Road and a house called 'The Lindridge' on the far side of Falcon Lodge.¹⁵

The bigger houses were also showing signs of affluence. Hollyfield House was enlarged¹⁶ and was considered 'one of the nicest moderate sized houses in the neighbourhood with its 'lawns, sunk fences, beautiful trees and lovely views over the town'¹⁷.



NEWHALL FARM (PHOTO FROM GEOFFREY BROWN of 14 MANEY HILL ROAD)

New Hall, too, which had fallen into a state of disrepair was brought up to scratch again by the Chadwicks¹⁸ and before the 19th century was out the house was being run as a school. Various plots on the New Hall Estate began to be sold off, one of them becoming New Hall Farm near the foot of Reddicap Hill.

Back at the top of the Hill, the rural outlook was disappearing fast. Terraces of houses were springing up, mainly on the northern side of the crossroads, the first 6 were built opposite today's Co-op Superstore and then a very long terrace on the other side of the road with a corner Post Office, perfectly situated, trading there for the next century¹⁹ Even in those days, letters were collected three times a day and once on Sundays²⁰.



*COTTAGES OPPOSITE THE CO-OP (built 1894)
(KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)*



*REDDICAP HEATH POST OFFICE AT THE CROSSROADS (built 1898/99)
(FROM KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)*

Another prestigious house, Rathmore, was built in 1891²¹ for Richard Parkes at the top of what was known as Boot Hill, now the corner of Rectory Road crossroads.

Fortunately for these new houses, in 1894 South Staffs Waterworks had just extended their water mains to the area²². This enabled yet another vital service to be installed in 1898 – fire hydrants – for which a certain Mr Richard Fowler, a local farmer, was no doubt very grateful some years later when his hayrick caught fire²³!

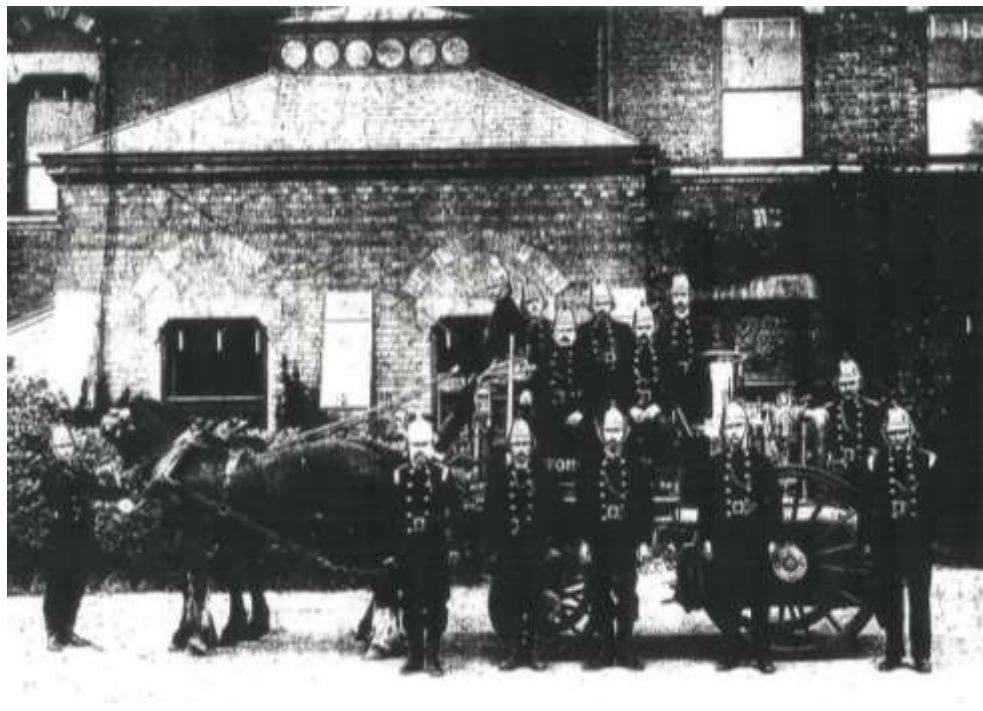
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- 3 LEA, Roger, *The Story of Sutton Coldfield*, Sutton Publishing Limited
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- 5 *1824 Corn Rent Field Names*, Plan Cabinet, Shelf 7
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- 8 *Parochial Valuation Map 1856*, Sutton Coldfield Library
- 9 *1840 Census Return*, Sutton Library
- 10 JONES, Douglas V. *The Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield* (P73), Sutton Library
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7. 1900 - 2000

Early 1900s

Fire, of course, was a very real worry to everyone in the early 1900s, especially the farmers, and, although there was a fire station in Mill Street, it was at least a mile away from Reddicap Heath. The horse drawn steam engine would have taken a while to reach it, but a fire engine charging up Reddicap Hill would have been a sight to behold!



MERRYWEATHER STEAMER FROM SUTTON REF. SC599

Another useful introduction to the streets were First Aid Fire Boxes – seven were put up in this area in 1903¹ - enabling the station to be called by telephone. These boxes appear to have been in the form of a long blue wooden case, with a small pane of glass which had to be broken to give access to a policeman's whistle and a key to open the box. The telephone was inside and, in some cases, a hand pump

and an extendable ladder.² Sadly, even then they were prey to vandalism.

The streets, outside the town, were still relatively quiet prior to the building boom of the 1920s. Cars were a rarity and all one met was the odd horse and cart or carriage and a few bicycles – traffic hold ups being caused by livestock driven to market by the local farmers.



REDDICAP HILL, CIRCA 1900

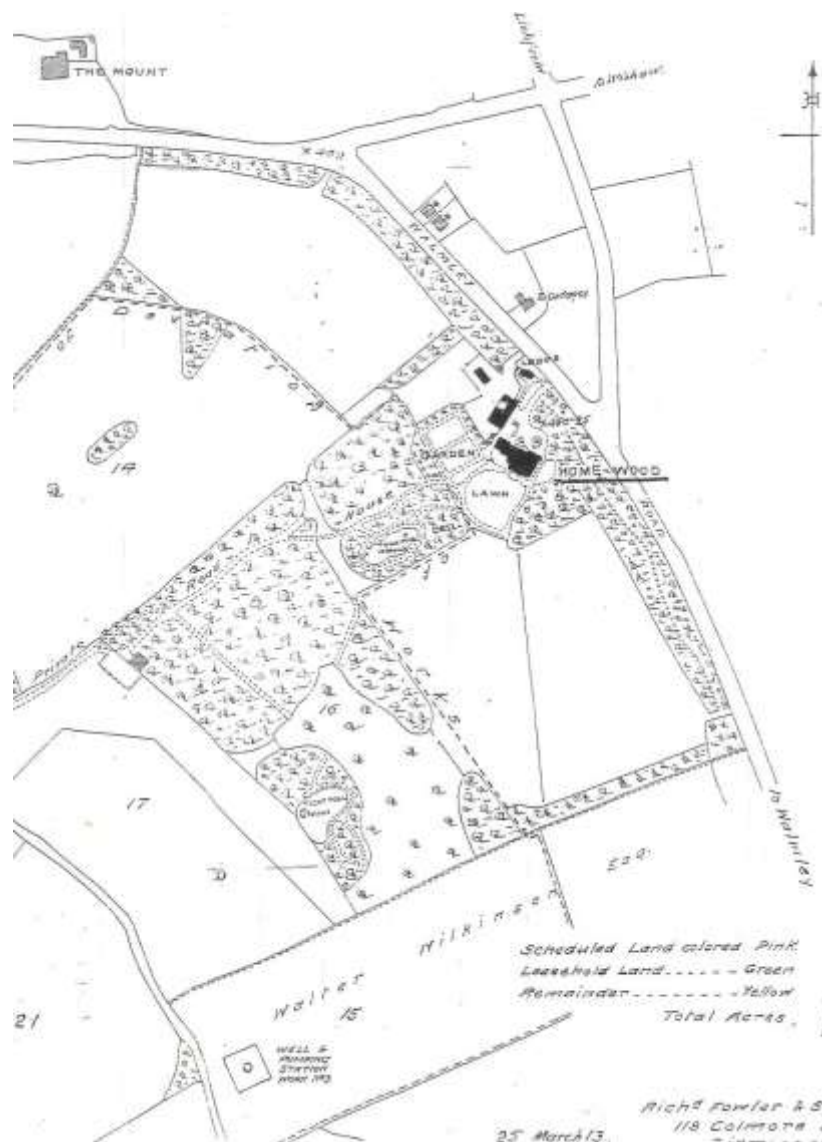
The farms in this area were generally mixed, arable and pasture, supplying mostly potatoes and milk. The farmers did very well for themselves, providing much local employment. Some were well known - Mr Parkes at *Falcon Lodge*, Francis King at *Church Grove Farm*, the Bird Family at *Yew Tree Farm* and William Kilborn who had farmed *Froggatts Farm* for over 50 years.³

Richard Fowler, one of many farmers whose hayricks caught fire⁴, was a relative newcomer who saw a prosperous future at Reddicap Heath. He was also a surveyor and, possibly, it was his business connections that enabled him to purchase several large plots of

land at Reddicap Heath, no doubt with house building in mind. There was a poem written at that time which said it all:-

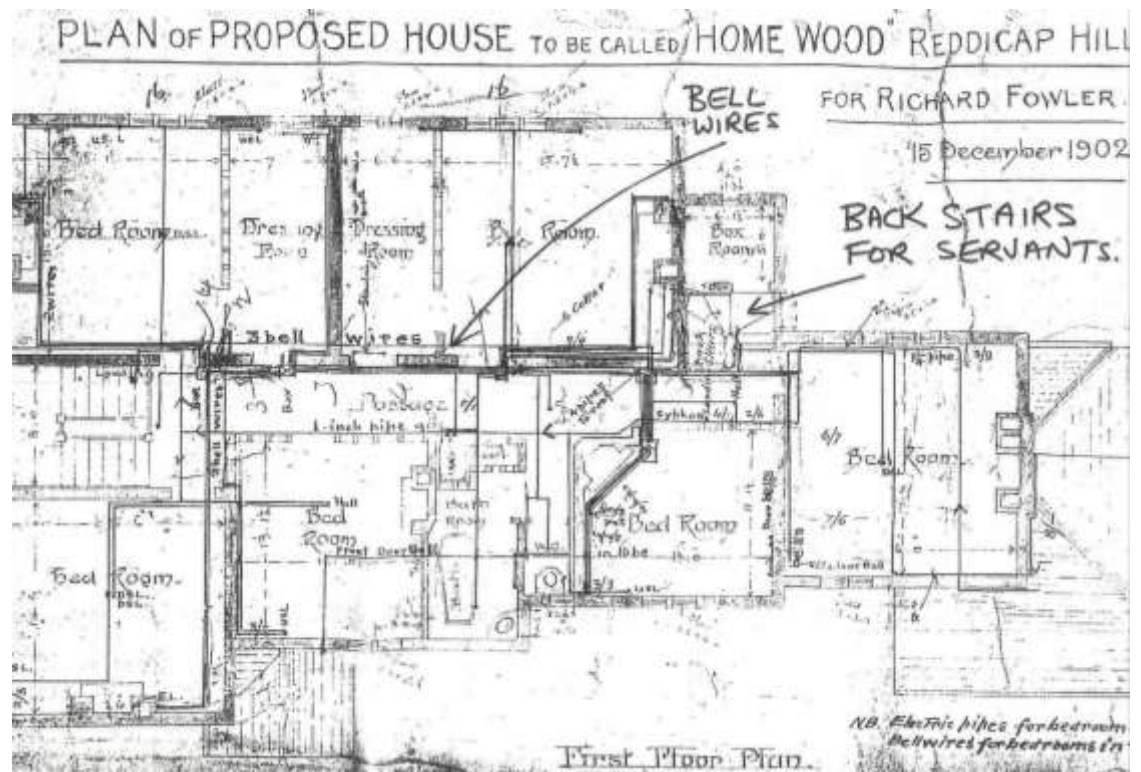
*“The richest crop for any field
Is a crop of bricks for it to yield
And the richest crop that it can grow
Is a crop of houses in a row!”⁵*

Mr Fowler’s own house, *Home Wood*, was built in 1903 on a perfect site, including many acres of land, at the top of Reddicap Hill and overlooking the Ebrook Valley. His house was very modern for its time, a worthy rival to John Lilly’s *The Mount*, a short distance away.



HOME WOOD 1913(BIRMINGHAM ARCHIVES MS/658)

Many of its numerous rooms were heated by electric pipes. There was a large wine cellar and bell wires to summon servants, who appear to have had their quarters at one end of the house.⁶ Its further attractions included a Dutch Barn and stables, a lodge house, a gate, 7 small plantations and ornamental pools. When it was sold to a Mr Walker in 1918, it fetched £3,500.^{6a}



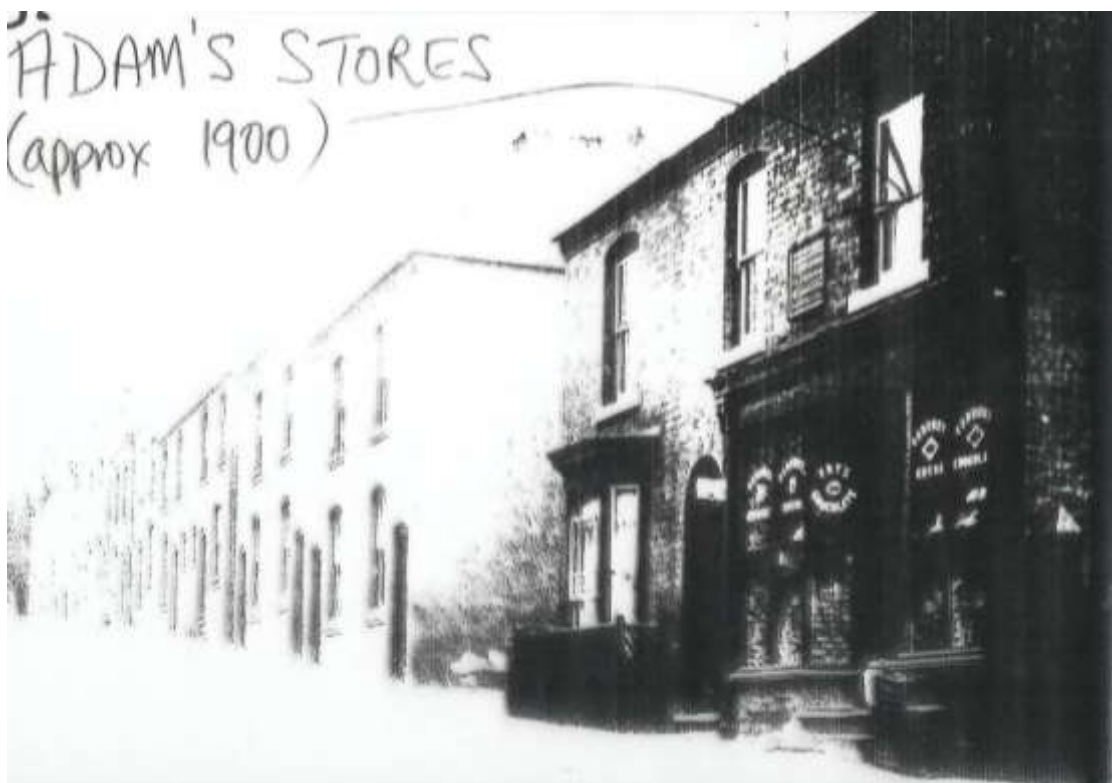
PLAN OF HOME WOOD 1902 SHOWING BELL WIRES AND BACK STAIRS FOR SERVANTS –
BIRMINGHAM LIBRARY ARCHIVES MS658/40

About this time, two other large houses appeared, *Langley Villa* on the northern side of Lindridge Road and *Highclere* at Rectory Road crossroads (this being the home of Oscar Stone, a relative of the well known photographer Benjamin Stone). The Council continued to provide housing for the man in the street in the way of small terraces, one beside the White Cottage in Walmley Road and another at the Walmley end of Springfield Road near Signal Hayes Road.^{7&3}



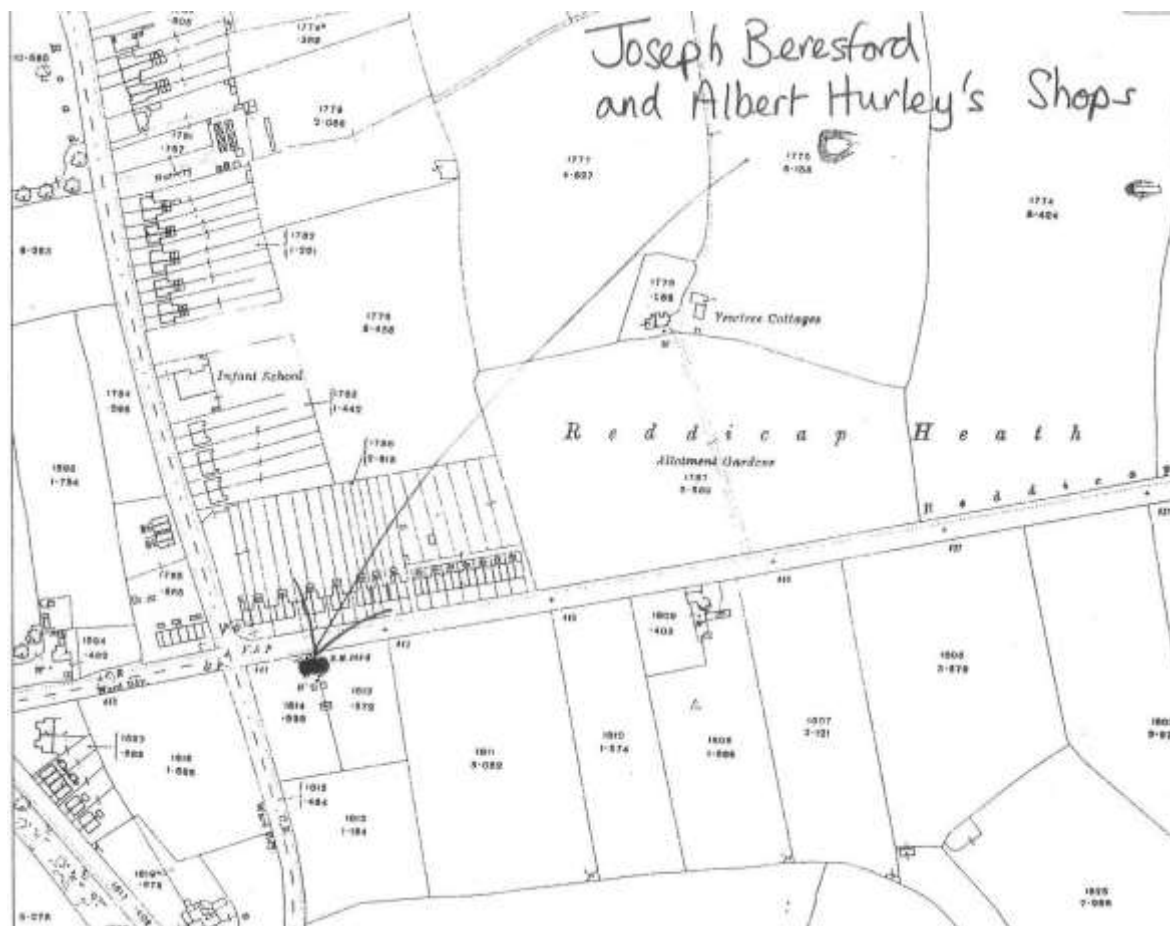
*HIGHCLERE – ABOUT 1904 – OSCAR STONE'S HOUSE
(SUTTON LIBRARY PHOTOS REF F/L4)*

Groceries were available locally from Adams' Stores in Reddicap Hill.



ADAMS' STORES APPROX 1900 (KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)

Joseph Beresford and Albert Hurley also traded as grocers from a couple of semi-detached cottages which they rented from a local landowner, Edward Lingard, on the site now occupied by the Reddicap Pub,

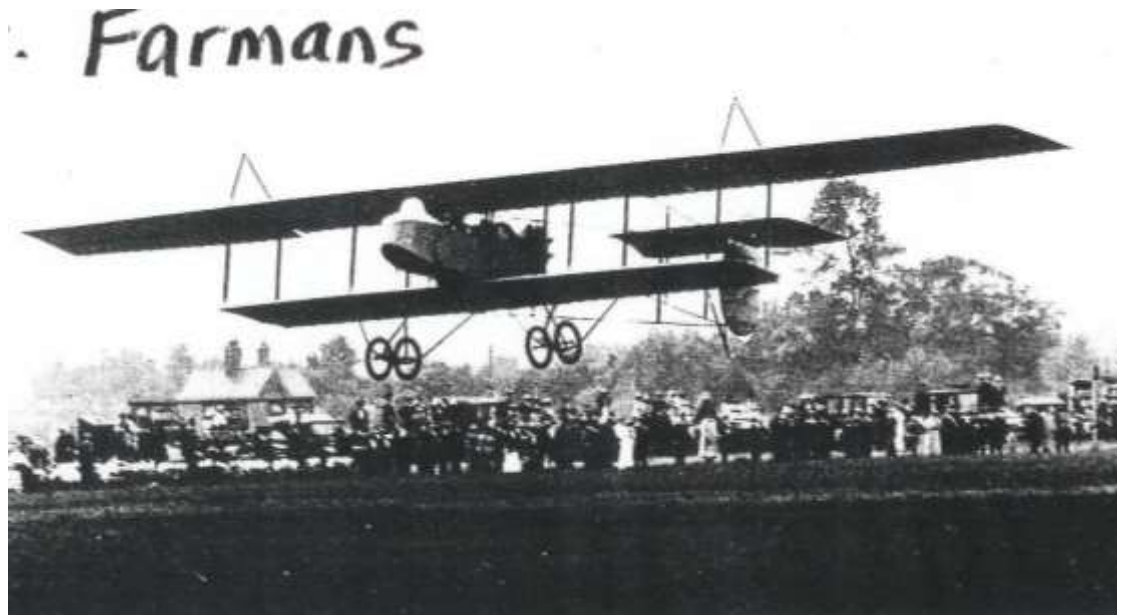


JOSEPH BERESFORD AND ALBERT HURLEY'S SHOPS – 1912 OS

There was, of course, the Post Office, and fish and poultry were supplied by a Mr Maeer. Mr Holden was the man to see for 'cole' and coke and milk could be obtained from Yew Tree Cottage.⁸

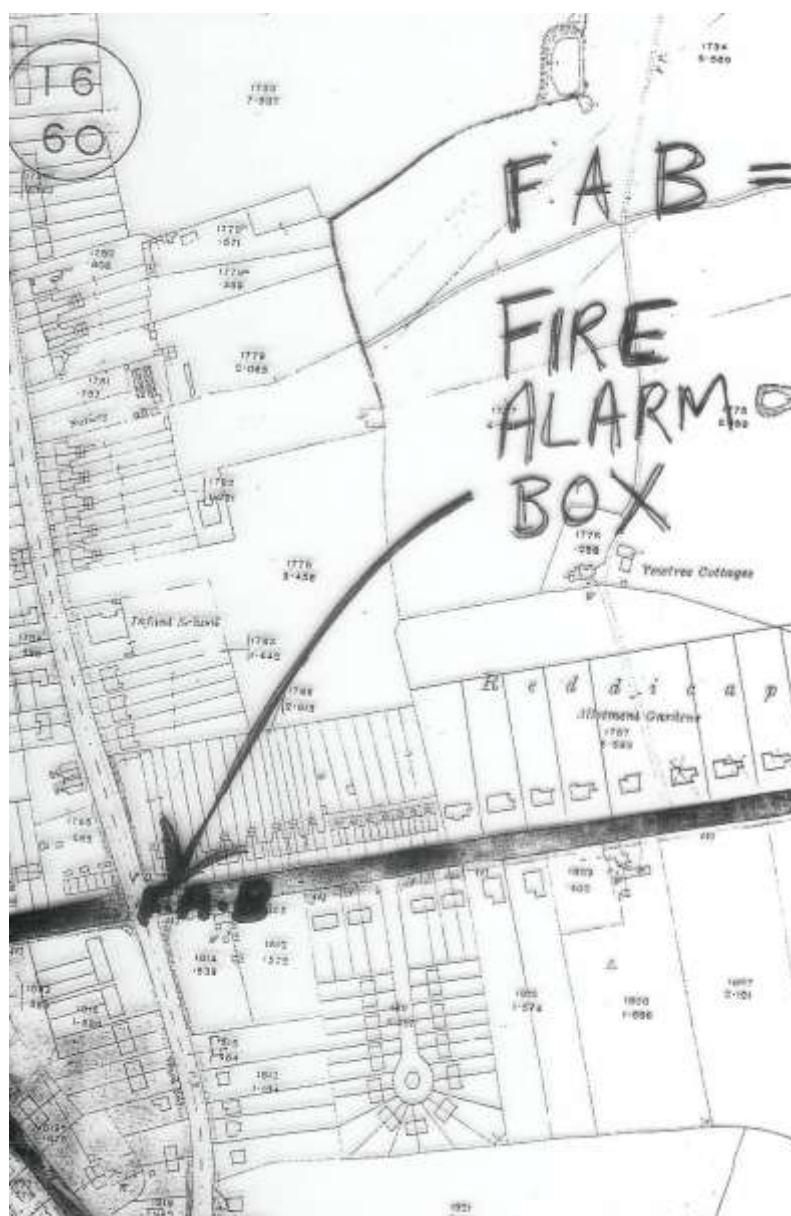
1910

In 1911, another war must have seemed a long way off, but, no doubt, people would have been a bit concerned to see the first airplanes circling overhead. These were based at Castle Bromwich airfield. Three years later, at the beginning of the War, the No 5 Reserve Aeroplane Squadron was formed there, training on aeroplanes with strange sounding names such as *Farmans*, *Shorthorns* and *Longhorns*. It was reckoned to be a good training place, because they could make a circuit of 2 or 3 miles and still get back home safely to the airfield.⁹



FARMANS AIRPLANE 1914 FROM AVIATION IN BIRMINGHAM – GEOFFREY NEGUS AND TOMMY STADDON (BIRMINGHAM LENDING LIBRARY)

As with many rural areas, life at Reddicap Heath carried on much the same during the War years. Farmers were needed at home. One of the things that did concern them was reported in the newspaper of the 27/28 March 1916 - a Great Blizzard - the worst Artic Storm in living memory¹⁰ - putting telephone communications out and causing immense damage to the Fire Alarm Boxes in the area¹¹. It may be the one at the Reddicap Crossroads was affected.



*FIRE ALARM BOXES NEXT TO POST OFFICE – TOWN PLANNING MAP OF 1935
(SUTTON LIBRARY)*

After the War, people with money, which included officers from the Army, were looking for nice places to live. A Government subsidy helped people to buy homes, and Richard Fowler took full advantage, selling off some of his prime sites either side of *Home Wood*. Several unusual pre-fabricated bungalows were erected on the plots, one became a poultry farm, another kennels and stables.¹² A few in Reddycap Hill remain, somewhat altered, to this day.



*NO'S 1 and 3 REDDICAP HILL(PRE-FABRICATED BUNGALOWS)
(KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)*

Down the road at New Hall, the boys' school had closed and the house reverted to an ordinary residence in the ownership of Mr Walter Wilkinson. He, in turn, sold it on to the well known Owen Family in the 1920s.¹³

1920

By then, however, a new Infants' School was up and running in Hollyfield Road, meeting the needs of the families moving into fine new housing which was being built all the way along its eastern side



*HOLLYFIELD INFANTS SCHOOL AND NEW HOUSING IN HOLLYFIELD ROAD 2004
(KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)*

In 1927, further down, on the opposite side, St Chad's Church ^{13a} was built near to Hollyfield House (then owned by the Ansell Family). The holly hedges were left high and the road was still untarmacked.

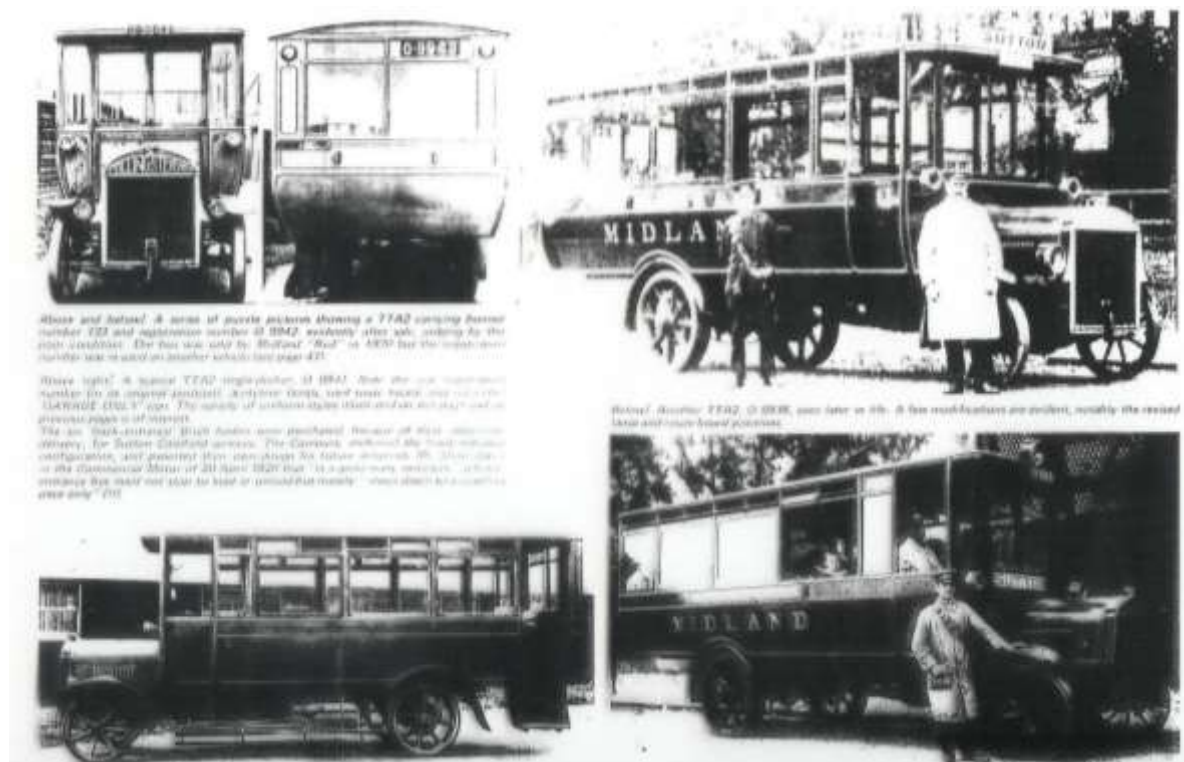
Hollyfield Crescent was completed next, and then Hollyfield Road South started to fill up with shops and houses.^{13b} Warwickshire County Council also built Berryfield Farm, near to the Walmley Road junction.¹⁴



ST. CHADS AND HOLLYFIELD ROAD SHOPS (KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)

All the services were now in place - electricity, water, sewers, gas and telephones – and omnibuses were finally going through Walmley and Reddicap Heath between Chester Road and Sutton.¹⁵

The lack of omnibuses had been a big problem, This fact, Mr Fowler's builder felt, had contributed to the slow sale of his houses. In 1924, the bus only ran twice a day. It was a Tilling Stevens, No 18F, with solid tyres. By 1925 things were improving – they ran one an hour.¹⁶ When the bus company, Midland Motor Omnibus Co decided to build its own buses, it introduced pneumatic tyres. This actually caused them a problem during the General Strike of that year. All the 'bus services had stopped, but the Company managed to sneak one or two 'buses out of the garage – only to have the strikers remove the valves from the pneumatic tyres, rendering them absolutely useless!¹⁷



TILLING STEVENS OMNIBUS, MIDLAND RED. VOL I BY PAUL GRAY – SUTTON LIBRARY REF QSH47.63

The buses were also used for delivering the daily newspapers to outlying shops. Ken Walker (born 1920), who lived at 85 Reddicap Heath Road in the terrace near the crossroads, remembers working in the paper shop at Reddicap Heath and having to collect the papers from the bus stop. One of the items in the news just then reminded people of the true cost of the recent war. It reported on a new fangled bicycle which had just been invented, designed for one legged cyclists, calling to mind the soldiers who had lost their limbs in the fighting!¹⁸

Ken also recalls, as a young boy, having to light the gas mantles at home. The lamplighter did the same to the street lights, carrying his ladder between each one. And, when the sewers were emptied, Ken says, the manholes were dusted with a pink powder to disinfect them against diptheria. That was one of the notifiable diseases, of which there were many, such as scarlet fever, erysipelas, enteric, tuberculosis and pneumonia – all very prevalent in 1929.¹⁹

Ken went to Hollyfield Infants School, where he says Miss Litherland was a lovely teacher. He also had good memories of Sir Alfred Owen who gave them rides in his car and formed a ‘Scriptures Union’ in the early 1930s. He said the children used to all join hands at the Reddicap Heath crossroads and walk down the Hill to “Church House” in Coleshill Street, singing hymns as they went along. Apparently, the pianist there, Mr Jermayn, was ‘used to a bit of ‘aggro’ from the kids’!

1930s

Another Suttonian, Mrs Gibbons who came from Erdington, remembers using the buses of the Thirties when visiting her aunt who lived a few doors away from Ken Walker’s house. Mrs Gibbons was very young then, but her mother put her on the bus and trusted the driver to see her off at the other end. Leaving the bus at Reddicap Heath, she posted a card given to her by her mother, confirming her safe arrival – her mother expecting to receive this on the same day!



ALLOTMENTS IN REDDICAP HEATH ROAD – 1912 OS

Amongst her memories, too, was the watercress growing in the allotments opposite the present Walsh Drive and the mushrooms near The Anvil Pub. She also remembered the phrase, particularly attributed to the people of Sutton, '*all kippers and curtains*', meaning they liked to appear grander than they really were!

But, of course, some of them could claim to be grand. Arthur Methley from The Mount owned a plane, a Gipsy Moth.⁹ Rumour has it that one of his aerial escapades landed him in a field next to the Anvil Pub – causing all round excitement and getting him into hot water! His friend, one of the aptly named and wealthy Flewitts from Hollyfield House also owned a plane and their exploits were well known locally.

As the Thirties progressed, a worry crept into people's lives. Was there going to be another War? Daily newspapers were avidly read. To keep up with the demand, a nice little newspaper shed²⁰, made of wood and glass, was put up at the foot of Reddicap Heath Road,

opposite the Anvil – a very good spot, because the Council were now building houses on the Falcon Lodge side of Reddicap Heath Road and parts of Springfield Road. Traffic was also increasing and the first 'Halt' signs had to be installed at the Reddicap Heath crossroads.²¹

Although a Second World War was imminent, the Council still had local issues to deal with. A real problem was vermin, which locally had got out of control. Every year a 'National Rat Week' was held and cinemas were encouraged to show slides regarding the importance of a systematic and concerted action to destroy them. Other concerns included the notifiable diseases which were still rife, and there was an unacceptable number of young children who were having to have their milk teeth taken out by general anaesthetic due to decay.²²

As War approached, the Council put in place air raid precautions at the Reddicap Heath Infants School. Shelter trenches were proposed at a cost of £250 each, providing a safe haven for 100 scholars. It was also proposed that teachers should go on a First Aid course, scholars should have respirators, and gas drills and telephones should be installed.²³

Whilst this was going on, a major concern for the Council was ticking away in the background. It knew it would need to provide hundreds of homes for the growing population. When it became possible to buy the vast tract of land at Falcon Lodge from the then owner, Mr Cattell, under the terms of the Housing Act 1936, the Council must have breathed a sigh of relief and the future of Falcon Lodge Estate was assured.²⁴

In 1939, they bought the land belonging to The Rectory and Hollyfield House, together now forming Rectory Park. The Rectory had already been demolished, but the extant Hollyfield House proved useful to them during the Second World War as offices for the Home Office Pensions Dept and as a storage area for the Fire Service²⁵. It has been said that fire engines were housed there although no records seem to exist – maybe for security reasons. Sadly, the house fell into disrepair by the 1950s and Hollyfield Drive now occupies its space.

1940s

The Forties, of course, finally brought the anticipated Second World War and, in Reddicap Heath, it must have been quite a frightening time. Both British and German aeroplanes were flying overhead, Lancaster Bombers and Spitfires were going up from Castle Bromwich airfield²⁶ and there were German bombers targeting the Barrage Balloon Centre, then situated at Whitehouse Common²⁷. Some of their bombs fell on Rectory Park, which probably didn't do much for the nerves of the Home Office staff!²⁸



BOMBS DROPPED IN RECTORY PARK 1939-1945 (SUTTON REFERENCE LIBRARY)

Life had to go on, however and, a welcome sight to many was the appearance of a new pub, which was named *The Reddicap*. This

had a bowling green and replaced Joseph Beresford and Albert Hurley's shops at the crossroads. No doubt, the residents of the newly built Stanley Avenue, further down Reddicap Heath Road, provided some of its first customers.

After the War and before the 1940s were out, the biggest residential development ever seen in Sutton Coldfield was completed when the huge Falcon Lodge Estate made its debut. This was an enormous undertaking that brought hundreds of families into the area, and those families desperately needed more schools.



*THE REDDICAP PUB AND HOUSES ON FALCON LODGE ESTATE
(KEITH JORDAN'S COLLECTION)*

1950s

These were provided in the Fifties and Sixties when Fairfax County High, John Wilmot Grammar, Woodington Infants and Falcon Lodge County Junior Schools were opened and they took up large swathes of land. However, there was still plenty more farmland ripe for development on the Walmley side of Reddicap Heath. Before long, residents from the new Springfield Crescent and Stephens Road were queuing for the same buses serving Reddicap Heath.²⁹



S72 BUS IN SPRINGFIELD ROAD ('WHEELS AROUND SUTTON' by JOHN BASSETT) SUTTON LIBRARY

Elsewhere, an area immediately to the north of Reddicap Hill had recently met the criteria for an easily accessible industrial site for Sutton. It became known as *The Reddicap Trading Estate* and, along with another development at Rectory Park Road, occupied most of the area between Reddicap Hill and Rectory Park. This precipitated the sale of the majestic Victorian house, '*The Mount*', to the Council, who made an offer the owners could not refuse. The house was demolished, to be replaced by blocks of flats, maisonettes and bungalows for the elderly. So prestigious was this development that The Duchess of Kent came to open it in October 1967.³⁰



THE DUCHESS OF KENT OPENING 'THE MOUNT' 1967 (SUTTON LIBRARY)

1960s & 1970s

In the affluent times of the Sixties and Seventies, traffic was increasing at a rate of knots. All houses were now built with garages, those in St Chad's Road being some of the first³¹, and, for those without cars, bus services were becoming more frequent and served larger areas.

Berryfields Farm and its land was sold off to builders such as Wimpeys, and by the Seventies, Walsh Drive linked Walmley Road to Reddicap Heath Road, with private houses in cul de sacs neatly slotted into the available space.

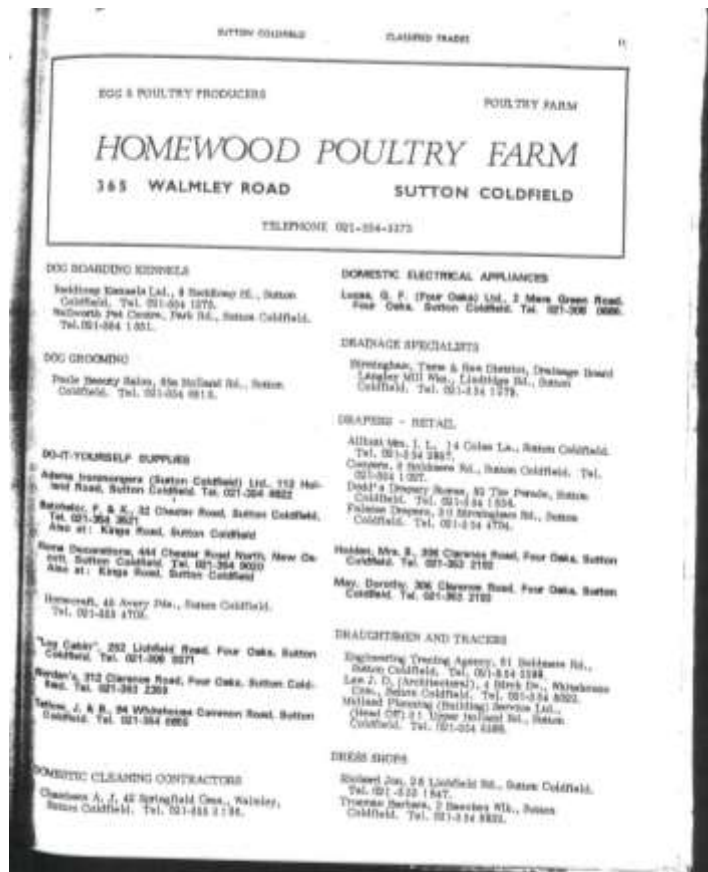
This period also saw the demise of the last of the old cottages mentioned on the 1811 Survey of the Warden & Society's property. Yew Tree Farm in Reddicap Heath Road was knocked down to make way for a Retirement Home (Heathway).³²

1980s to 2000

The Eighties saw the demise of New Hall as a family home. The Owen Family had been the longest running owners, but, ultimately, a Mr Michael Blakemore sold it to Thistle Hotels in 1985, since when it has been run as a prestigious hotel, a jewel in Sutton's crown.³³

The Eighties also saw the end of Froggatts Farm, its land sliced up once again by the builders.³⁴ Every space was occupied by different types of houses or hi-rise flats. Remaining was a swathe of common land between Walmley Road and Springfield Road, possibly left undeveloped for future use? Some years were to pass before the true purpose of this became known.

In the meantime, Mr Fowler's *Home Wood*, which had been operating as a poultry farm for years and selling eggs to the passers by in Walmley Road, was sold to Grevayne Homes. The superior houses they erected there on the newly named *Forest Park*, sold from £72,500.³⁵



HOMEWOOD POULTRY FARM IN SUTTON DIRECTORY 1973 (SUTTON LIBRARY)

SUPERB FURNISHED SHOW BUNGALOW

Forest Park.

SUTTON COLDFIELD
by GREYAYNE HOMES

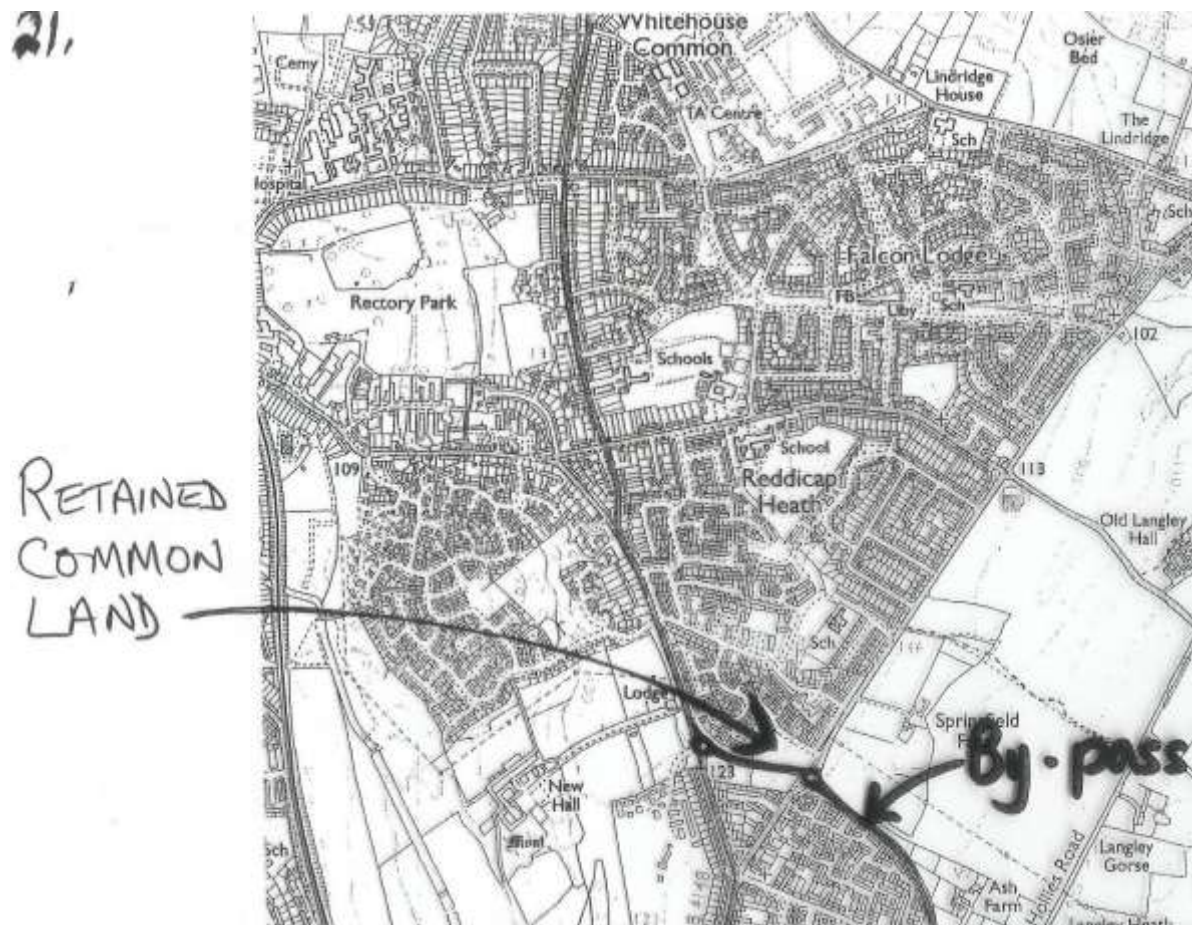
4 NOW SOLD

SHOW BUNGALOW
FROM £72,500 FREEHOLD
PART EXCHANGE AVAILABLE

FOREST PARK - FROM SUTTON NEWS 1984 - SUTTON LIBRARY

Building development continued right up to the year 2000. The acquisition by Bryant Homes of the remaining farm land in the New Hall Valley, drifting down from the top of Reddicap Hill to the River Ebrook at the bottom and across to the boundary of New Hall Hotel, meant that Reddicap Heath had become almost entirely residential for the first time in its history.³⁶

Thankfully, some green areas have been left, none more useful than the retained common land between Walmley Road and Springfield Road which was eventually used to provide a roadway corridor to the new Walmley Village by-pass, completed early in the new millennium.³⁷



RETAINED COMMON LAND USED FOR BY-PASS (OS EXPLORER 2002)

2000+

Since the year 2000, individual new houses have continued to go up, wedged into every nook and cranny available. A wide variety of shops at the crossroads provides a very useful service to the area and buses now are very frequent. Life is bustling at Reddicap Heath and one wonders where the next improvements will come from. One thing is certain, based on its past record, things will never stand still!

The Future

So, what with excellent schools, transport, roads and shopping facilities, it is a popular place to live. I certainly find this to be the case and I trust my enthusiasm for Reddicap Heath has been very apparent. I leave it to someone else to continue its story from the Second Millennium.

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INDEX

<i>'All kippers and curtains'</i>	60	<i>Bishop Vesey's charter</i>	18
Access	11, 21	<i>Blabs, the</i>	28
Acres,	18	Blacksmiths	40
<i>Act of Parliament 1824</i>	37	<i>Blakemore, Michael</i>	66
<i>Adams Stores</i>	42, 51	<i>Blobs, the</i>	28
<i>Adams, Charles</i>	36, 41, 43	Boggy meadow	7
<i>Adams, John</i>	42	Boiler room	43
<i>Adams' Family</i>	27, 41	Bombs	62
<i>Adams' Will</i>	42	Books	42
<i>Addenbrookes</i>	22	Boom time	12
<i>Addenbrookes Hospital</i>	22	Boot Hill	45
Aeroplanes	53	Boundary	1, 10
<i>Agnes Bracken</i>	7, 26	Boundary ditch	11, 14
Agricultural labourer	36, 40	Bowling green	63
Agricultural landscape	11	Boys' school	55
Agriculture	33	Bricklayers	40
Air raid precautions	61	Bricks	49
Airfield	53, 62	<i>Broadfield</i>	19
Airplanes	53	<i>Bronze Age</i>	3, 4
<i>Albert Hurley</i>	52, 63	<i>Brown, Sarah</i>	32
Ale	20	<i>Bryant Homes</i>	68
<i>Alfred Owen, Sir</i>	59	Building boom	48
Allotment	37, 60	Building development	68
Allotted	36	Building programme	42
<i>Andrew Hackett</i>	36	<i>Bulls Lane</i>	13
Anglo-Saxon times	5	Bungalows	44, 64
Annual fair	12	Burnt mounds	4
<i>Ansell Family</i>	57	Bus	58, 59, 66, 69
<i>Anvil Pub</i>	60, 61	Butler's pantry	43
Arable	48	Butter	20, 41
Arctic Storm	53	Buttercups	28
Army	17	By-pass	68
Army officers	54	Cabinet maker	40
<i>Arnold, James</i>	36	Candles	32
Artefacts	4	Cannock	3
<i>Arthur Methley</i>	60	Carpenters	40
Assarted land	13	Carriage	48
Assarting	11, 14	Cars	48
Assarts	12	Carts	42
Award, 1851	37	Castle Bromwich	53, 62
Bailiff's account	13	<i>Cattell, Mr</i>	61
Bake house	42	Cattle disease	15
Bank and ditch boundaries	10	Cattle	10, 13, 14, 18, 28
Bank of earth	5, 6	Chadwicks	36, 44
Barley	30	Chapel	30
Barn close	19	<i>Chapman's Field</i>	37, 38
<i>Barr Beacon</i>	7	Charcoal	4
Barrage Balloon Centre	62	Charities	30
Bartering	12	<i>Charles Adams</i>	36, 41, 43
<i>Bassett, Edward</i>	36	<i>Charter, 1528</i>	17
<i>Bassett, John</i>	66	<i>Chas Cooper</i>	36
<i>Bassett's Field</i>	36, 37, 38	Cheese	41
<i>Bassetts</i>	29	<i>Chester Road</i>	58
<i>Battle of Barnet</i>	17	Children	41
Bell wires	50	Chinese room	43
Belt	10, 39, 40	Church	13
<i>Ben Woodward</i>	36	<i>Church Grove Farm</i>	39, 48
Benefactor	17	Cinemas	61
<i>Benjamin Stone</i>	50	Clearing	14
<i>Benjamin Williams Leader</i>	34	Coal store	43
<i>Beresford, Joseph</i>	52, 63	Coffee	41
<i>Berryfields Farm</i>	57, 66	Coke	52
<i>Beyond the Wood</i>	9, 13	Cole	52
Bicycle	48, 59	Common	37
<i>Bird Family</i>	48	Common land	11, 13, 18, 37, 66, 68
<i>Bird, Widow</i>	36	Commons	18, 21, 29, 31, 32, 33,
Birds	32		36, 37, 38
<i>Birmingham</i>	4, 29, 43	Communication by road	13
<i>Birmingham Northern</i>		Coney	14, 19, 20
<i>Relief Road</i>	4	Coney catch	15
<i>Bishop Vesey</i>	17, 18	Coney warren	14

<i>Co-op Funeral Directors</i>	41	Farm land	68
<i>Co-op Funeral Parlour</i>	28	Farmans	53
<i>Co-op Superstore</i>	44	Farmers	30, 47, 53
<i>Cooper, Chas</i>	36	Farming methods	37
Corn	11, 20, 30	Farmland	11, 64
Corporation	28, 41, 42	Farms	31, 38, 40, 41, 48
Cottage	17, 22, 32, 34, 38, 66	Farmstead	5
Council	50, 61, 64	Fashion	15
Council houses	36	<i>February Fildyke</i>	34
Council tenants	36	Fenced in	9
Cow house	36	Fencing	37
Cow stocks	42	Ferrets	15
Cows	41	Field system	5
Cowshed	42	Fire	46, 47
Cowslip	20	Fire Aid course	61
Crenellated house	39	Fire Alarm Boxes	53, 54
Crops	11, 30, 49	Fire engine	47, 61
Crossroads	1, 44, 45, 53, 59, 61, 63, 69	Fire hydrants	46
Crown	13	Fire Service	61
<i>Cul de sacs</i>	66	Fire Station	47, 61
Cultivate	19	Fireplace	20
Cultivated fields	12	Firewood	19
Dairy	41	First Aid Fire Boxes	47
Dairy close	19	Fish	20, 52
Dark Ages	5	Fishing and pooles	19
Deed of Exchange 1126	10, 11	Flats	64
Deer	7, 8	<i>Flewitts</i>	60
Diphtheria	59	Flint	4
Dirt tracks	30	Flour	11, 20
Ditched enclosures	5	Food	20
<i>Document of 1500</i>	10	Forest	3, 5, 7
<i>Document of 1586</i>	19	<i>Forest Park</i>	66, 67
Dogs	15	<i>Fowler, Mr</i>	49, 58, 66
Doldrums	17	<i>Fowler, Richard</i>	46, 48, 54
Dovecote	20	<i>Fox Hill</i>	33
Dovehouse	19	<i>Fox Hollies</i>	4
Drovers	5	<i>Francis King</i>	48
<i>Duchess of Kent</i>	64	<i>Froggatt's Farm</i>	39, 48, 66
Dutch Barn	50	Fruit picking	41
Earl	7, 8, 10, 11, 17	Fuel	9, 29
<i>Earl of Warwick</i>	10, 17	Fur	15
<i>East of Sutton survey</i>	3, 4	Furniture	42
<i>Ebrook</i>	30	Furry linings	15
<i>Ebrook Valley</i>	49	Gaps	31
<i>Ebrook, River</i>	68	Garages	66
Education	41	Gardeners	40
<i>Edward Bassett</i>	36	Gardening	41
<i>Edward Lingard</i>	52	Gardens	19, 43
Eggs	20	Gas	58
Elderberry	20	Gas drills	61
<i>Elderslea Retirement Home</i>	66	Gas mantles	59
Electric pipes	50	Gate	50
Electricity	58	General anaesthetic	61
<i>Elizabeth Taylor</i>	36	General Strike	58
Enclosed	9	Gentleman outfitter	43
Enclosing	37	Gentry	8, 29
Enclosure	19, 36, 40	German aeroplanes	62
<i>Enclosure Act, the</i>	37, 39	German bombers	62
Enteric	59	<i>Gibbett Hill</i>	33
Entrance gates	30	<i>Gibbons, Mrs</i>	59
<i>Erdinton</i>	59	<i>Gipsy Moth</i>	60
Erysipelas	59	Girls	41
Exchange of land	10	Government subsidy	54
Exeter	17	Graze	9
Extendable ladder	48	Great Blizzard	53
Fair	33	<i>Greaves Farm</i>	23
Fair Days	41	<i>Greenwood's Map 1820</i>	39
<i>Fairfax County High</i>	64	<i>Grevayne Homes</i>	66
<i>Falcon Lodge</i>	1, 24, 31, 39, 44, 48, 61	Groceries	51
<i>Falcon Lodge</i>		Grocers	41, 52
<i>County Junior School</i>	64	<i>Grove Farm</i>	39
<i>Falcon Lodge Estate</i>	61, 63	<i>Hackett, Andrew</i>	36
Farm buildings	24	<i>Halt signs</i>	18
Farm labourers	39	Hams	20
		Hand pump	47
		Hangings	32

Harness	42	<i>Ken Walker</i>	59
Harvest	33	Kennels	54
Harvest failure	15	Kersey weaving	17
Haunches of venison	20	Key	47
<i>Hawkesnest</i>	25, 36, 37, 48	<i>Kilborn, William</i>	48
Hay	20, 30	King	7, 11, 14, 17
<i>Hay</i>	10	<i>King Henry I</i>	10
Haymaking eason	41	<i>King Henry VIII</i>	17
Hayrick	46, 48	<i>King, Francis</i>	48
<i>Hearth Tax</i>	29	<i>Kingmaker</i>	17
Heat shattered stone	4	Labourer	8, 37
Heath	8	Labourer's cottages	39
Heather	20	Ladder	48, 59
Hedging	37	Lamplighter	59
Herbs	20	Lamps	32
Herds	7	<i>Lancaster Bombers</i>	62
<i>Highclere</i>	50, 51	Land	18
Hi-rise flats	66	Land management system	36
<i>Hodder, Dr Mike</i>	4, 5	Landowner	12, 30, 36, 37, 38
<i>Holden, Mr</i>	52	<i>Langley Farm</i>	31
<i>Holland Road</i>	7	<i>Langley Hall</i>	36
Hollow	6	<i>Langley Hall Farm</i>	24
Holly hedges	57	<i>Langley Mill Farm</i>	4
<i>Hollyfield Crescent</i>	57	<i>Langley Villa</i>	50
<i>Hollyfield Drive</i>	61	Lard	20
<i>Hollyfield House</i>	22, 23, 36, 44, 57, 60,	<i>Leader, Benjamin William</i>	34
	61	Leases of land	42
<i>Hollyfield Infants School</i>	59	<i>Lilly, John</i>	43
<i>Hollyfield Road</i>	1, 22, 23, 31, 56	<i>Lindridge Road</i>	1, 23, 39, 50
<i>Hollyfield Road South</i>	31, 57	<i>Lindridge, The</i>	44
<i>Holy Trinity Church</i>	30	Linen	42
Home baked bread	41	<i>Lingard, Edward</i>	52
<i>Home Office</i>	62	<i>List of Householders</i>	29
<i>Home Office Pensions Dept</i>	61	<i>Litherland, Miss</i>	59
<i>Home Wood</i>	49, 50, 54, 66	Litter	20
<i>Homewood Poultry Farm</i>	67	<i>Little Sutton Common</i>	33
Honey	20	Livestock	10, 48
Hoods	15	Living room	43
Hops	20	Lodge	7
Hopyard	19	<i>Lodge house</i>	50
Horse	42	Longhorns	53
Horse and cart	48	Lot	18, 19
Horse drawn steam engine	47	<i>Lot Acres</i>	18
Horsemen	32	Lottery	18
House building	49	<i>Maeer, Mr</i>	52
House-cum-shop	42	Maisonettes	64
Houses	42	Managed estate	10
Housing	18, 41, 56	Managed woodland	13
<i>Housing Act 1936</i>	61	<i>Maney</i>	43
Housing boom	18	Manholes	59
Hovel	27	<i>Manor</i>	10, 18
<i>Hughes Family</i>	36	<i>Manor Hill</i>	7
<i>Hunt, the</i>	7	<i>Manor House</i>	10
Hunting dogs	36	<i>Map of 1530</i>	18
Hunting expedition	7	Market	12, 13, 15, 48
Hunting grounds	7	Marsh	8
Hunting lodge	7	<i>Marsh Marigolds</i>	28
<i>Hurley, Albert</i>	52, 63	Mattresses	20
Hymns	59	Mead	20
Industrial revolution	36	Medieval chapel	30
Industrial site	64	Medieval documents	10
<i>Infant's School</i>	56	Mercian Kings	5, 7
<i>Ingle Neuk</i>	23	<i>Methley, Arthur</i>	60
<i>Iron Age</i>	5	<i>Methwold, Norfolk</i>	14
<i>Jacksons</i>	29	<i>Michael Blakemore</i>	66
<i>James Arnold</i>	36	<i>Midland Motor Omnibus Co</i>	58
Jars	20	Milk	20, 48, 52
<i>John Adams' Shop</i>	42	Milk teeth	61
<i>John Bassett</i>	66	Milking	41
<i>John Fairfax School</i>	26	Mill Street	47
<i>John Lilly</i>	43	Mills	11
<i>John Page</i>	36	<i>Milne meadow</i>	19
<i>John Wilmot Grammar</i>	64	Moated mansion house	11
<i>Joseph Beresford</i>	52, 63	<i>Mollyblobs</i>	28
<i>Joseph Starkey</i>	36	Moonlight	32
<i>Joseph Whittacre</i>	36	<i>Moorland Cottages</i>	24, 36

Mushrooms	60
<i>Myring Place</i>	39
Mystery building	30
<i>National Rag Week</i>	61
Nettle beer	20
<i>New Hall</i>	1, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 30, 36, 39, 44, 55, 66
<i>New Hall estate</i>	9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 19, 31, 44,
<i>New Hall Farm</i>	44
<i>New Hall Hotel</i>	68
<i>New Hall Valley</i>	68
<i>New House</i>	22
<i>New stock meadow</i>	19
<i>New Street</i>	43
<i>Newe Hall</i>	19
<i>Newhall boundary</i>	39
Newspaper report	53
Newspaper shed	60
Newspapers	59, 60
Night watchmen	32
<i>Norman Conquest</i>	7
Notifiable diseases	59, 61
November	15
Oats	30
<i>Oldehay, le</i>	10
<i>Old Langley Hall</i>	4
Omnibuses	58
One legged cyclists	59
<i>One park, one hay fenced and an outwood</i>	10
Open field	13
Open fields	8, 13, 21, 29, 38
Orchard	19, 36
Ornamental pools	50
<i>Oscar Stone</i>	50, 51
Outwood	8, 9, 10, 11, 13
<i>Owen Family</i>	55, 66
<i>Owen, Sir Alfred</i>	59
<i>Ox Leys Road</i>	5, 13
Oxen	8
<i>Page, John</i>	36
Paper shop	59
Papers	59
Parish relief	30
Park	10
<i>Parkes, Mr</i>	48
<i>Parkes, Richard</i>	45
Pasture	8, 14, 48
Pease	30
Pelts	15
<i>Pepper, Mr</i>	39
Pictures	42
Pig	41
Pigeon loft	20
Pigeons	41
Pigs	14
Pigsty	36
Pink powder	59
Plague	15
Planning Archaeologist	4
Plantation of trees	39
Plantations	50
Plate	42
Plots of land	48
Plough	8
Pneumatic tyres	58
Pneumonia	59
Poem	49
Police force	17
Policeman's whistle	47
Poor	18, 28, 29, 36
Population	8, 12, 15, 18, 29, 36, 61
Post Office	44, 52, 54

Postcard	59
Potatoes	48
Potted rabbit	20
Pottery	5
Poultry	41, 52
Poultry farm	54, 66
Poverty trap	30
<i>Pre-1824 Enclosure Map</i>	38
Pre-fabricated bungalows	54, 55
Prehistoric times	4
Privy	43
<i>Prowde field</i>	19
<i>Pudseys</i>	36
Rabbit	14, 15, 41
Rabbit fur	15
<i>Rad Way Cop</i>	28
Railway line	43
<i>Rathmore</i>	45
Rector	25
<i>Rectory Park</i>	1, 61, 62
<i>Rectory Park Road</i>	64
<i>Rectory Road</i>	1, 22, 23, 39, 45, 50
<i>Rectory, the</i>	61
<i>Reddeweycopes</i>	14
<i>Reddeweycoppes</i>	13
<i>Reddicap Heath</i>	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 17, 18, 29, 30, 32, 33, 34, 30, 40, 41, 47, 48, 49, 53, 58, 59, 62, 64, 68, 69,
<i>Reddicap Heath crossroads</i>	15, 36, 61
<i>Reddicap Heath Road</i>	13, 25, 31, 37, 44, 59, 60, 63, 66, 67, 68
<i>Reddicap Hill</i>	1, 5, 6, 7, 13, 26, 27, 28, 36, 41, 42, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49, 51, 54, 55, 64, 68,
<i>Reddicap Pub</i>	44, 52, 62
<i>Reddicap Trading Estate, the</i>	64
<i>Redicop Lane</i>	34, 36
<i>Redicup Heath</i>	32
Religious instruction	41
Rent	14, 19
Rent	19
Residential development	63
Respirators	61
<i>Richard Fowler</i>	46, 48, 54
<i>Richard Neville</i>	17
<i>Richard Parkes</i>	45
Ridding of a coppice	14
<i>River Ebrook</i>	30, 68
Roads	17, 39, 69
Roadway corridor	68
<i>Robert Thompson</i>	37
<i>Roger Lea's Schematic plan 1086</i>	9
<i>Roger Lea's Schematic Plan of 1320</i>	12
Roman times	5
Romans	5
Rubble walls	22
Rural areas	53
Rushes	20
Rushlights	32
Rye	30
Sandstone	22
<i>Sarah Brown</i>	32
Sauna-type bathing	4
Scarlet fever	59
<i>'Scenes from Sutton's Past'</i>	7, 8, 9, 13
Scheme	18
Scholars	61
School	44, 63, 69
School record	41
Schooling	41
<i>Scriptures Union</i>	59

Scrub	8	<i>Tamworth</i>	5
<i>Second Millennium</i>	69	<i>Tamworth Road</i>	28
<i>Second World War</i>	61, 62	Tax for Ship-money	29
Servants	43, 50	Taxes	29
Settlements	21	<i>Taylor, Elizabeth</i>	36
Settlers	5	Tea	41
Sewers	58, 59	Telephone communications	53
Sheep	28	Telephones	47, 58, 61
Shelter trenches	61	Tenants	8, 37
<i>Shenstone</i>	7	Terrace	44, 50
Ship-money tax	29	<i>The Belt</i>	39
Shopping	69	<i>'The Lands to be Enclosed'</i>	38
Shops	44, 69	<i>The Lindridge</i>	44
<i>Shorthorns</i>	53	<i>The Mount</i>	43, 49, 60, 64
Shoulders of cloaks	15	<i>The Rectory</i>	61
<i>Signal Hayes</i>	10	<i>Thistle Hotels</i>	66
<i>Signal Hayes Road</i>	50	<i>Thompson, Robert</i>	36, 37
<i>Simmonds, William</i>	36	<i>Thompson's Lane</i>	37
<i>Sir Alfred Owen</i>	59	<i>Tilling Stevens</i>	58
Skins	15	Timber	17, 29
Slides	61	Timber building	4
Smallholdings	8	Timber housing	5
Smell	15	<i>Timothy Wood</i>	39
<i>Smith, William</i>	39	Tools	5
Smoke	20	<i>Town Planning Map of 1935</i>	54
Social factors	13	<i>Town School</i>	41
Soldiers	59	Tracks	31
<i>Soma House</i>	24	Trading Estate	27
<i>South Staffs Waterworks</i>	46	Traffic	32, 48, 61, 66
South town	5	Transport	69
<i>Spaghetti Junction</i>	7	Trenches	10
Spiral staircase	17	Trimmings	15
Spitfires	62	<i>Trinity Hill</i>	41
<i>Springfield Crescent</i>	64	Tuberculosis	59
<i>Springfield Road</i>	1, 24, 39, 40, 50, 61, 66, 68	Turf	29
Squadron	53	Turret	43
Squatters	12	<i>Twamley, William</i>	32
<i>St Chad's Church</i>	22, 57	Untarmacked	57
<i>St Chad's Road</i>	66	Vales	58
Stables	19, 36, 50, 54	<i>Valuation Map, 1857</i>	25
Stabling	42	Vandalism	48
<i>Stanley Avenue</i>	63	Vermin	61
<i>Starkey, Joseph</i>	36	Vesey	17
Steam engine	47	<i>Vesey hallmark</i>	17
<i>Stephen's Pond</i>	32	<i>Vesey Houses</i>	17, 18
<i>Stephens Road</i>	64	Victorian house	43, 64
Stewpond	20	Wagons	32
Stone Cottage	28, 29	<i>Walker, Mr Ken</i>	50, 59
Stone houses	17	<i>Walking in their Footsteps</i>	4
Stone spiral staircase	17	<i>Walmley</i>	9, 10, 58
<i>Stone, Benjamin</i>	50	<i>Walmley Road</i>	1, 10, 11, 17, 30, 39, 40, 50, 57, 66, 68
<i>Stone, Oscar</i>	50, 51	<i>Walmley Road, No 460</i>	29
Stoney wards	19	<i>Walmley Village by-pass</i>	68
Straw	20	<i>Walsh Drive</i>	60, 66
Streams	32	<i>Walter Wilkinson</i>	55
Street lights	59	War	53, 54, 60, 63
Strikers	58	<i>Warden & Society</i>	17, 18, 25, 28, 36, 66
Strips of land	8	Warren	15
Suburbs	43	<i>Warren Farm</i>	17
Sunk fences	44	<i>Warwickshire County Council</i>	57
<i>Survey of Charity</i>		Washhouse	43
<i>Estates, 1811</i>	34, 66	Waste	2, 36
Surveyor	48	Water	58
<i>Sutone</i>	5	Water mains	46
<i>Sutton</i>	5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 29, 32, 42, 43, 58, 64, 66	Water mill	30
<i>Sutton Chase</i>	5, 7	Watercress	60
<i>Sutton Coldfield</i>	2, 3, 22, 28, 29, 37, 63	Wheat	20, 30
<i>Sutton Coldfield Common</i>	33	<i>Wheatacre close</i>	19
<i>Sutton Directory 1973</i>	67	<i>'Wheels around Sutton'</i>	66
<i>Sutton Park</i>	7, 10	Whistle	47
<i>Swan Meadow</i>	28	<i>White Cottage, the</i>	50
<i>Syndenhamhey</i>	10	<i>White House Cottage</i>	29
		<i>White House Farm</i>	22
		White painted cottage	27
		<i>Whitehouse Common</i>	1, 62

<i>Whitehouse Common Road</i>	22
<i>Whitehouse Farm</i>	36
<i>Whittacre, Joseph</i>	36
<i>Whorwood's Field</i>	37, 38
<i>Whorwoods</i>	29
<i>Widow Bird</i>	36
<i>Wilkinson, Walter</i>	55
<i>William Kilborn</i>	48
<i>William Simmonds</i>	36
<i>William Smith</i>	39
<i>William Twamley</i>	32
<i>William Yates' Map</i> <i>of Warwickshire 1793</i>	21, 22, 27, 31
<i>Wimpeys</i>	66
<i>Wine</i>	20
<i>Wine cellar</i>	50
<i>Wood</i>	9
<i>Wood produce</i>	14
<i>Wood, Timothy</i>	39
<i>Woodington Infants</i>	64
<i>Woodland</i>	8, 9, 17
<i>Woods</i>	20
<i>Woodward, Ben</i>	36
<i>Woollen industry</i>	17
<i>Worship</i>	30
<i>Yeoman farmers</i>	8, 29
<i>Yew Tree Cottage</i>	26, 52
<i>Yew Tree Farm</i>	25, 31, 48, 66