

**A HISTORY OF 'CHALFORD',  
BELWELL LANE, FOUR OAKS, SUTTON COLDFIELD,  
INCLUDING THE FAMILIES WHO LIVED THERE.**



**'Chalford' – Circa 1900**



**'Chalford' – Circa 2000**

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(A Member of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group)

**June 2011**

# INTRODUCTION

In May 2008, I read a newspaper article in the Sutton Coldfield News to the effect that the entire Household Contents & Personal Items of '*Chalford*', a Victorian house situated in Belwell Lane, Four Oaks, was due to be sold via public auction on Saturday the 7<sup>th</sup> June.

It was also planned for the property to be opened for viewing on the preceding day between midday and 8.00pm in the evening.

Upon reading the article further, I discovered the Auctioneer, Charles Hanson, had described '*Chalford*' as "**Wonderfully rambling**" and subsequently he went on to say "**It is like walking back in time and has the magical feel of a Mary Poppins era**".

This piqued my interest and my wife & I duly arrived at 65 Belwell Lane on the appointed day, to be met with scenes resembling the start of a football match! Belwell Lane itself and nearby Clarence Road were absolutely choked with cars on both sides of the street and through traffic was finding it almost impossible to make progress. Eventually, the police were called in to try to restore some sort of order to the general confusion.

Long queues had formed down the long entrance driveway to the house and, as we arrived, this had started to spill out onto the narrow footpath outside. So many people had turned up to the viewing that the Auctioneers eventually felt the need to organise a rota system, whereby only a dozen or so visitors were allowed through the front door at any one time, as the house itself was absolutely filled to bursting point!.

When we finally gained access and began to edge through the individual rooms and hallways, we began to see what Charles Hanson had experienced upon entering '*Chalford*' for the first time. It was almost like being in a dual time warp, with the old Victorian house itself and its fixtures & fittings, coupled with the remaining contents which gave a unique feel of the 1940's & 50's, being untouched by modernisation.

It was a lovely warm, sunny day and so, afterwards, we wandered through the extensive grounds, which were completely surrounded by mature shrubs and trees. This imparted a wonderful air of peace and tranquillity, despite the fact that it was a mere stone's throw away from the hustle and bustle of the modern world.

Later that same year, I made some initial tentative enquiries, in an attempt to discover more about the property and its owners. I was lucky enough to find that the original occupant was a Mr. Edward Hill James and that he was a successful and respected Wine & Spirit Merchant, with premises in the centre of Birmingham.

This subsequently led me to pay a visit to Birmingham Central Library Archives where, by chance, I came upon a real '*golden nugget*' to add to my growing knowledge on the subject. I found that, when the firm in question ceased trading in the late 1960's, after more than a century of doing business, the bulk of its records were donated to the library, thus providing me with rich source of research material. This material spurred me on and it resulted in an interesting and rewarding journey of discovery. Whilst in the midst of this research, I thought I would try to make contact with the last owners and, with the help of Quantrills Estate Agents, I was lucky enough to be able to trace them to their new residence in the Cotswolds.

Mrs Lindsay Brown kindly agreed to meet up with my wife and me at the property, prior to it being sold, and we were allowed free access to the house and grounds. During this meeting, I was able to elicit additional background information and to take extensive photographs for record purposes, some of which are incorporated in this publication.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working on this project and can only hope some of my enthusiasm is transferred to the reader.

K. M. Jordan  
Sutton Coldfield  
June 2011

# **A HISTORY OF ‘CHALFORD’, BELWELL LANE, FOUR OAKS, SUTTON COLDFIELD, INCLUDING THE FAMILIES WHO LIVED THERE.**

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# CHAPTER 1.

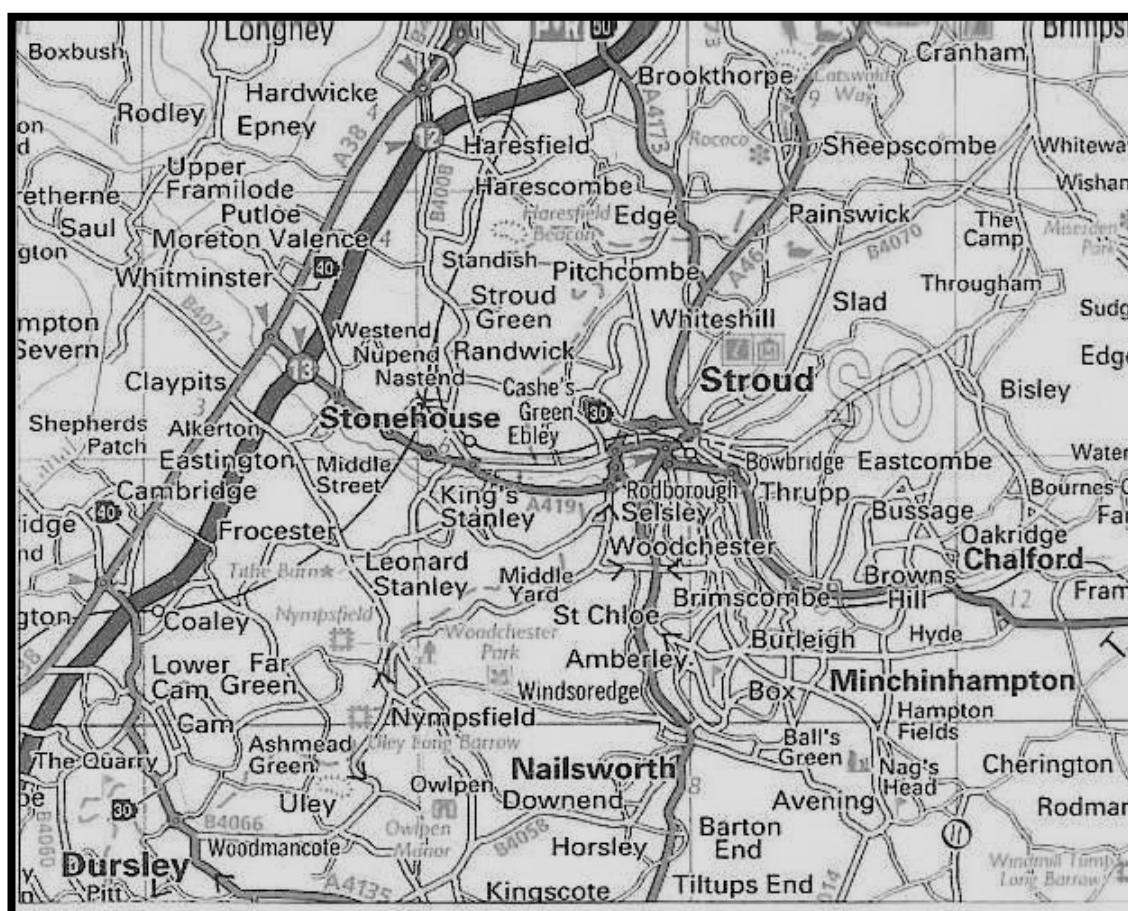
## **EDWARD HILL JAMES & FAMILY.**

### Early Days

Our story begins in the County of Gloucestershire, close to the Cotswold town of Stroud.

Stroud is located at the divergence of the five 'Golden Valleys', so named, it is thought, after the monetary wealth created over several centuries in the processing of wool from the plentiful supply of water power available in the area.

The five valleys are named *Chalford, Painswick, Nailsworth, Slad & Cam.*



Map of the area around Stroud.

Chalford is the largest of the valleys and it is where the River Frome runs along the bottom of a deep, narrow gorge.

The Frome powered in the region of 150 mills, during the heyday of the wool trade, turning Stroud into the centre of the local cloth industry.

Today, sadly, only two mills continue to make cloth, these being the high quality felt for the covering of tennis balls and the green baize used for snooker and billiard tables.

The original villages of the Chalford Valley comprised *Chalford*, *Chalford Hill*, *France Lynch*, *Bussage* & *Brownshill*. These were originally squatter settlements, which gradually developed to provide housing for weavers and other cloth workers, as expansion of the woollen and silk industries took place in the early Middle Ages.



**Looking down into Chalford - Circa 1900.**

The early weaving industry was cottage based, these being scattered haphazardly along the sides of the valleys. They would have each contained a broad loom for weaving cloth. The woven cloth would then have been taken to the mills in the valley bottom, for the final stages of the cloth making process.

In order to facilitate the transportation of the finished cloth, the Thames & Severn Canal was built and this was opened in 1789. It was soon extremely busy and was in frequent daily use. Unfortunately, however, due to the building of the railways and increasing use of the motor vehicle, the canals gradually went into decline and the Thames & Severn was eventually abandoned, along with many others during this period.



**Canal at Chalford.**

As the weavers grew in prosperity, many of the simple early dwellings were enlarged, either by the adding of upper floors or the building of extensions to the sides or rear. The process of upgrading may also have been associated with increasing family size and population.

This continued through into the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries and some of the original cottages became fairly large and complex.

Unfortunately, however, by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the cloth industry was going into terminal decline and great hardship was beginning to be felt amongst the villagers and workers. Some families were even paid to emigrate, in order to reduce the burden on the Parish.

It was against this background that Edward Hill James was born in 1827, in the village of Chalford Hill. It is likely that Edward's unusual middle name was derived from his place of birth.

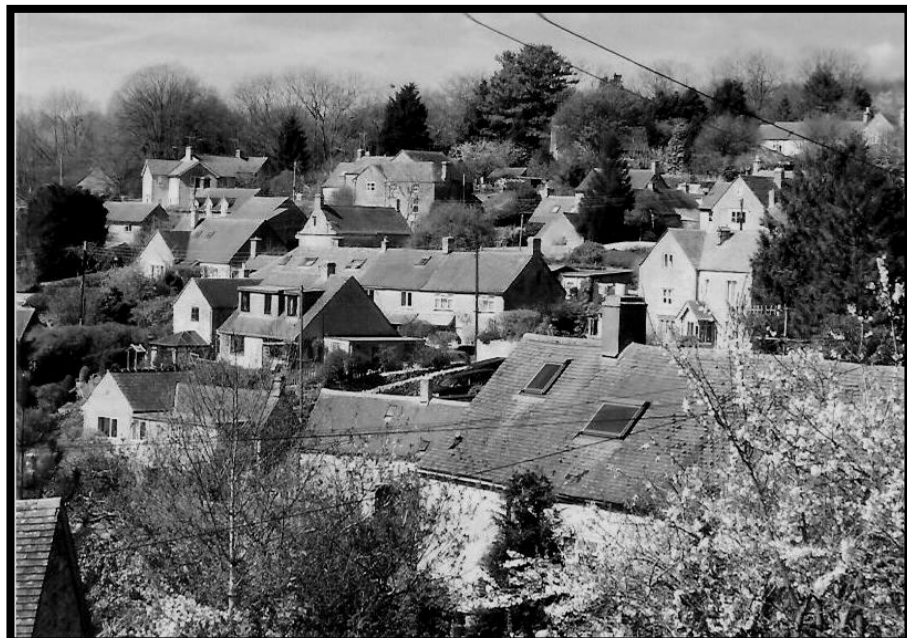
Edward was the youngest of a family of thirteen. His father, Gideon James, was a Tailor by trade which, during this period, would have been a common one for the area.

Life must have been extremely hard for such a large family with so many mouths to feed, with jobs in short supply and the region in decline.

Seeing that prospects in Chalford Hill and its surrounds were diminishing rapidly Edward's father decided to move out and, together with the members of his family still living with him at the time, he left Gloucestershire completely and travelled north to Birmingham, in an attempt to seek out a better standard of life.

## **Chalford Hill Today**

Chalford Hill today is quite different and it is now quite a prosperous area. A new housing estate has been built a little further up the valley slope, which includes quite a large number of detached homes. In addition, many of the old workers cottages have been modernised or are in the process of being altered and extended.



**Chalford Hill, still showing the scattered arrangement of its housing.**



**The Village Green, Chalford Hill.**



**Modernised Workers Cottages.**



**Cottage in the process of being modernised.**

## A New Beginning

After his arrival in Birmingham, Gideon James's first thoughts would have been directed towards the finding of suitable accommodation in which to live and from which he could ply his profession as a Tailor.

It was normal in those days for tradesmen to live above their place of business. In this fashion, they were able to work longer hours and it also enabled them to cut down on costs by not having to pay travelling expenses. He managed to find what he was looking for in Aston Road, in the Parish of Aston.

An examination of the 1841 Census Return shows him living there with his wife Elizabeth, three of his sons and his youngest daughter Hannah aged 16. Edward, at the time, was aged 15 and would have been starting to learn the trade.

Work gradually built up and, as more customers were acquired, Gideon's reputation grew.

Ten years later, in 1851, the Census Return indicates that, by this time, his wife Elizabeth had died and Edward Hill James had completed his apprenticeship and was now a qualified Master Tailor. His father's business must have grown nicely, because it showed he had two employees, in addition to a General Domestic Servant named Charlotte Poulteny

By 1861, more changes had occurred within the James family. The Census Return, completed in that year, indicates the father, Gideon James, was 76 and had retired and the business was being run by his son William. William James had subsequently married Elizabeth and they had had a daughter of the same name aged 15 and a son William H James aged 13. Edward had moved out some years before and had found a place of his own nearby in Phillip Street.

It would appear, at that particular time, Phillip Street comprised a miscellany of differing trades. Close to Edward's house and shop were the following occupations:-

<i>Michael Sloane</i>	<i>(Retail Brewer)</i>
<i>Norris Roberts</i>	<i>(Cigar Maker)</i>
<i>Charles Powles</i>	<i>(Gun Barrel Borer)</i>
<i>Abel John</i>	<i>(Smith)</i>
<i>William Smith</i>	<i>(Carpenter)</i>
<i>John Tilsley</i>	<i>(Pearl Button Maker)</i>
<i>John Dolman</i>	<i>(Awl Blade Maker)</i>

It can be seen from this small cross-section taken from just one street, how the saying '*Birmingham, a city of a thousand trades*' was derived.

A page from his Cash Book dated the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1854, approximately 12 months after the setting up of his business, shows a healthy return. It can be seen that he is already employing a servant (most likely an assistant) at a weekly wage of 6/8d.

[illegible]

Page from the Cash Book of Edward H James dated 1<sup>st</sup> February 1854.

In addition to his being a businessman, Edward seemed also to have been a personable young man, as it did not take him very long to catch the eye of a Birmingham girl named Lucy Marsh. Shortly afterwards they were 'walking out' together and, on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 1856, they were married at the Church of St. Silas, in the Parish of Lozells.

As was common in those days, shortly after they were married they decided to start a family and their first child was born in 1858. She was christened Laura Mary James.

Edward continued to work hard as a Tailor during the remainder of the 1850's.

## **An Exciting Opportunity**

At the beginning of the 1860's, however, important changes in the licensing laws were introduced. This, together with a reduction in wine duties, helped newcomers enter the trade. Edward James quickly saw an exciting opportunity and decided to branch out into an additional venture.

He became a part-time Wine Merchant and subsequently, in 1861, he established himself at No.7 Ann Street, in the centre of Birmingham. His tailoring business, however, continued to form the basis of security for himself and his wife Lucy for several more years.

The range of 18<sup>th</sup> Century brick built buildings fronting Ann Street culminated in Bryan's Pastry Shop at the corner of Congreve Street. The photograph below also shows in the distance, at the corner of Eden Place, Lloyd's Bank nearing completion.



**Ann Street from the junction with Congreve Street in 1870.**

The view today has totally changed. Ann Street has gone completely, to be replaced by Colmore Row. Birmingham Council House now occupies the space taken up by the old buildings seen in the foreground. This was built during the period 1874-1879, in the Italian Renaissance design.

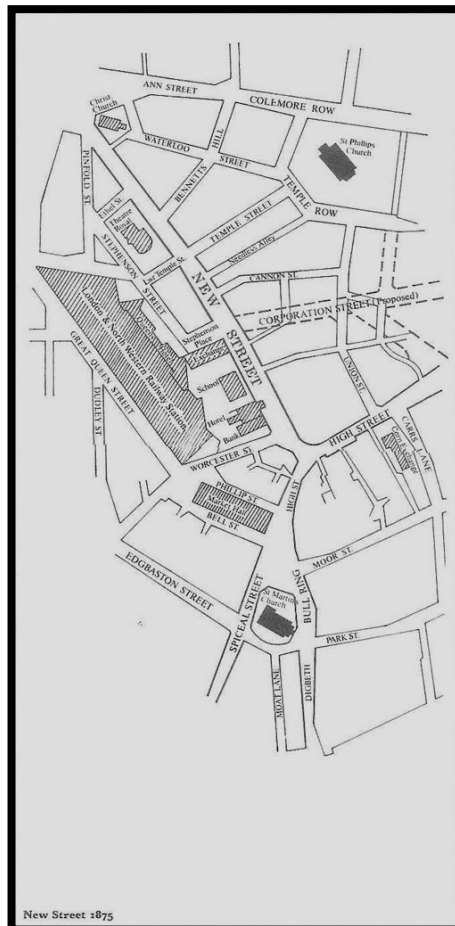
Robert Peel's statue by Peter Hollins, situated in the centre of the street, can now be found in Edgbaston. In its place, a new statue of Queen Victoria was erected in 1901. Victoria Square was named after her and it now forms an impressive frontage to the Council House.

No.7 Ann Street was actually situated further along, near to the junction with Newhall Street. It is more than possible Edward James would have walked down the uneven cobbled street on his way to Bryan's Pastry Shop to make purchases.

Ann Street and Colmore Row, on the southern boundary of the Newhall Estate, were developed for housing around the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century by the widowed Ann Colmore & her son, Charles.

Over the next few years the wine and spirit venture expanded rapidly. There were two main reasons for this, namely:-

1) Trading conditions during this period were entirely different from those of today. No large brewery companies existed. Public houses were owner occupied and therefore they were free to purchase their stock where they pleased. Consequently, a wide field was open to wine and spirit merchants.



**Map of Birmingham City Centre 1875.**  
**Ann Street and Colmore Row can be seen at the top.**

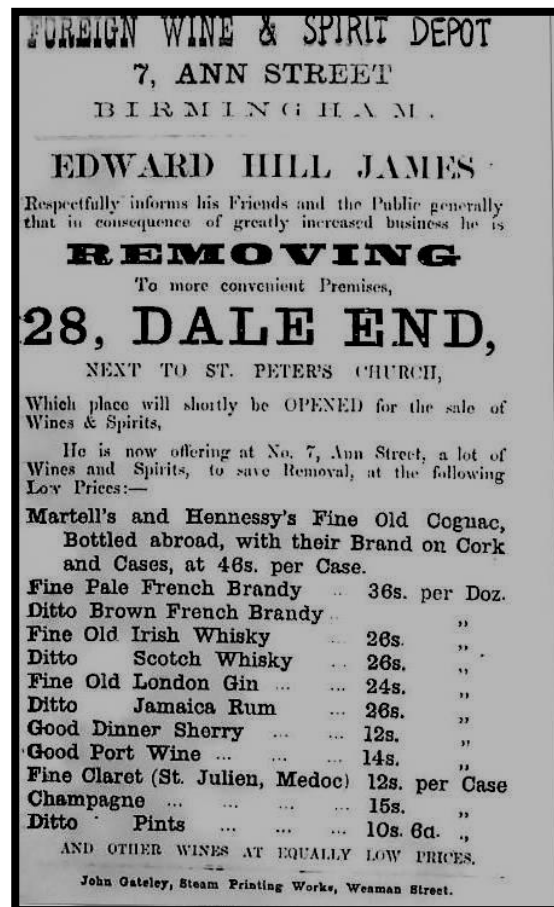
By means of hard work and judicious salesmanship, Edward gradually built up a large number of retailers and public houses in Birmingham and the Black Country, who were supplied by **Edward Hill James**, as the company was then called.

2) His method of trading was relatively unique at this time. The firm was one of the few wine & spirit merchants to buy and sell for cash only terms. This system of cash trading met with great success. He circularised every inn-keeper and wine merchant each quarter, bringing his firm to the notice of many customers, who discovered the benefits of lower prices for cash payments. This method seems very strange to us today as, over the past few decades, we have become used to the availability of endless easy credit. Very much a case now of 'buy now – pay later'!



Due to rapid growth, Edward James began to find his existing premises at Ann Street already becoming too small. This, together with the fact his lease was due to expire in the near future, prompted him to consider moving to larger accommodation, approximately 7 years after his initial move into the business.

In order to reduce the cost of moving all his stock to the new premises, he cannily decided to hold a sale and produced the following poster to advertise the event.



Poster produced by *Edward Hill James* in 1868.

It was not only his business which was growing at this particular point in time! Although still living at Phillip Street, where he and his wife would continue to reside until the early 1870's, further additions to the family had taken place. Edward and Lucy now had six children. Laura Mary James, as mentioned earlier, was joined by the following :-

<i>Benjamin James</i>	<i>Born</i>	<i>1860</i>
<i>Edward Hill James (Jnr)</i>	"	<i>1862</i>
<i>Alice Lucy James</i>	"	<i>1863</i>
<i>Agnes Gertrude James</i>	"	<i>1865</i>
<i>Kitty Elizabeth James</i>	"	<i>1867</i>

## A Change of Premises

Edward James finally decided upon 29 Dale End, Birmingham (please note **not** 28 Dale End, as indicated on the poster) as being the ideal premises in which to continue the firm's expansion. The area at the time was also the centre of the wine trade. He completed the move in 1868.





**29 Dale End, Birmingham 1868.**

No. 29 had originally been built as a dwelling house in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, when it had a garden at the rear, with fruit trees and lawns running down to Moor Street.

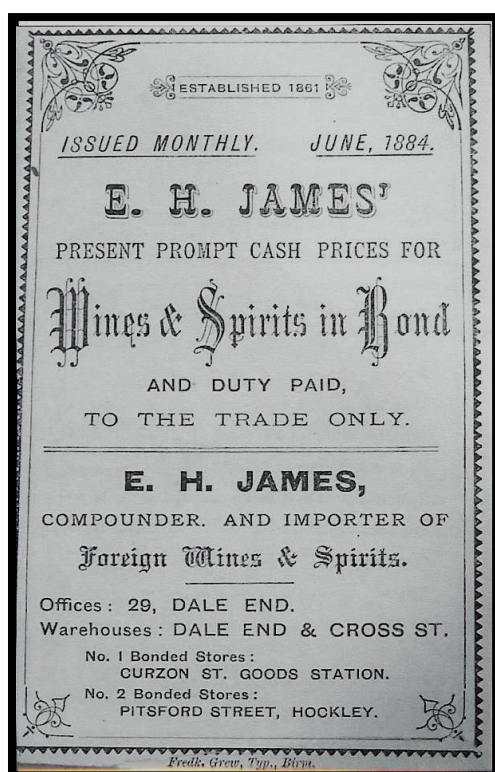
For many years it had been the residence of a Mr. Grice, who had a gun making business in nearby Bull Street. In about 1850 it was converted for commercial purposes and a factory was built in the garden at the back.

## **Cash Payment Scheme**

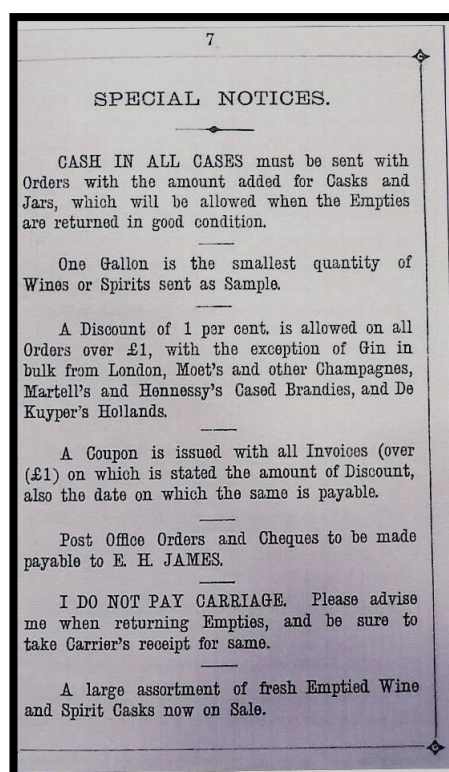
As mentioned previously, E H James introduced a revolutionary cash only system of trading. In his monthly newsletter dated June 1884 he made particular reference to this scheme. He stated:-

*“In submitting my revised Price List for the present month, I beg to cordially thank all my friends who have hitherto supported my cash system; indeed, it is very gratifying for me to now inform you that the new undertaking has developed considerably. Since I reduced the prices of Brandy, Whiskey, and Rum at proof strength to 13s. per gallon, I have noticed a much greater demand for these particular goods, thus showing that the qualities must be better and the prices lower than other firms are supplying; in fact, I have no hesitation in stating that there is no firm in existence who can undersell me at these prices. It is doubtless well known to many that since I introduced myself to the trade as a seller for Cash, several other firms in Birmingham and elsewhere have also issued a Cash Price List. At present this has not affected me in any way – indeed, on the other hand, my trade is increasing, but I wish to call the attention of cash buyers to the fact that my prices are lower than any of them, some considerably lower, while I have always used the most strenuous endeavours to dispatch all goods at the proper strength and quality as denoted on my List.”*

On the last page of his Price List he included a Special Notice laying down in detail his terms.



Price List dated June 1884.



Details of Cash Terms.

## Bonded Warehouses

At this point in time, because such progress had been made, the firm of *E H James* found it necessary to open Bonded Stores at Curzon Street Goods Station and also at Pitsford Street, Hockley.

The dictionary definition of a Bonded Warehouse is as follows:-

*'A warehouse authorised by H M Customs & Excise for the storage of alcoholic beverages on which payment of duties is deferred until the goods are removed.'*

Still this was insufficient, as the firm found the need to be able to *'blend and bottle'* in bond, but there were no facilities in Birmingham for such operations. The purpose of this type of warehousing is to benefit the trade by enabling the payment of excise duty to be postponed until the goods are removed for sale on the home market.

Many alcoholic beverages are deposited in warehouses by the manufacturers themselves or by wholesalers to whom manufacturers have sold in bulk. Once in a bonded warehouse the goods may be traded between dealers without leaving the warehouse. As long as the goods remain in bond, they may be traded without incurring payment of duty.

After protracted negotiations with the Inland Revenue, *E H James* was instrumental in the establishment of a bonded store at the new Midland Railway Goods Station being built at Worcester Wharf in Suffolk Street. It was subsequently opened in 1891.

## A Leafy Suburb

Despite the worries associated with running a successful business and the inevitable long hours, the welfare of Edward's family was still uppermost in his thoughts.

In the early 1870's it was decided that they should move from Phillip Street, where they had lived for nearly 20 years, to the private living quarters above the business premises at 29 Dale End.

Unfortunately, however, this arrangement was relatively short lived, due to the advent of a serious fire in those same quarters and the family were forced to move out and seek alternative accommodation.

This time a decision was made to move out of Birmingham completely and into the leafy suburb of Sutton Coldfield.

A major factor in this thinking was almost certainly due to the fact that in 1862 the railway reached this sleepy, rural town. A branch line had been built from Birmingham New Street and the journey time was less than 30 minutes.

The resident population was in the region of 4,500 prior to the event, but this was now beginning to rise quite rapidly with more and more people moving into the area, many being businessmen and workers, who began to use the railway to commute.

A substantial hotel, known as the 'Royal' opened in 1865. This was built just above the railway terminus. Sutton Coldfield was now being looked upon as a destination for day trips and even short holidays, with visitors from Birmingham & the Black Country 'taking the air' and exploring the large expanses of Sutton Park.

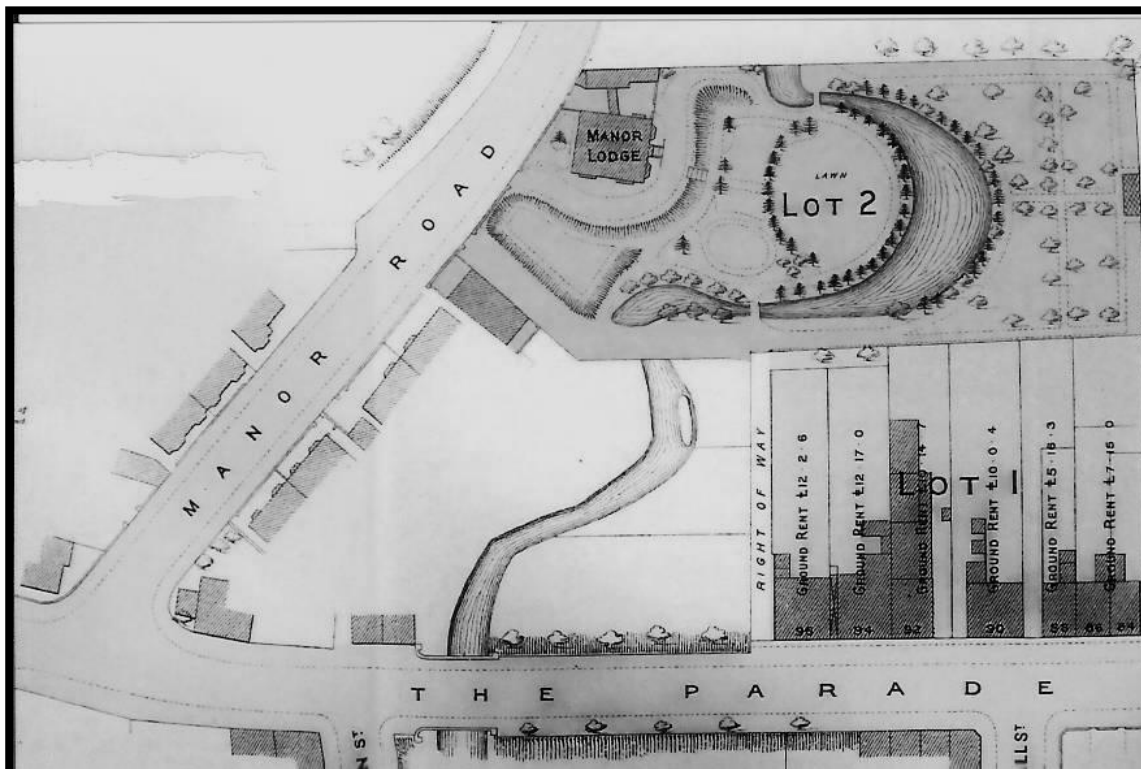
An article, written for the Birmingham Journal on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1862, just prior to the opening of the branch line, neatly encapsulated the thinking at the time. In it the journalist wrote the following:-

*"The completion of the railway between Birmingham and Sutton Coldfield deserves a passing word of comment and congratulation. When this event has taken place the rush of pleasure seekers will begin, and thousands of our townsmen will be glad to find in Sutton Park the fresh air and recreation they cannot easily obtain nearer home. We may perhaps venture to give a friendly hint to our townsmen and our Sutton neighbours We would have the former remember that as they obtain access to Sutton Park only out of neighbourly courtesy, it is more incumbent upon them to see that no damage is done, and that the privilege is not in any way abused. On the other hand, the corporation of Sutton will no doubt act in a liberal spirit in framing such regulations as may be thought necessary – bearing in mind that the fewer and simpler the rules laid down, the more likely are they to meet with willing obedience. Rightly used, the opening of this railway ought to prove of great benefit to both towns, for many Birmingham men would be glad to take up their residence in Sutton, and the latter place will have a cheap and easy means of communication with Birmingham, which has hitherto been practically as far off from them as Rugby is from ourselves".*

The property Edward James purchased was a relatively new house, having been built in 1868 under the supervision of the Architect Mr. William Jenkins.

It was a leasehold, detached, gentleman's residence, standing in its own grounds of approximately one acre.

The property was positioned just behind the main Parade in Manor Road and was known as 'Manor Lodge'. It was described, at the time, as a Gothic Villa Residence.



**Plan of 'Manor Lodge', Manor Road, Sutton Coldfield.**

The accommodation comprised:- Hall, Vestibule, 3 Reception Rooms, China and Kitchen Pantries, Kitchen, Scullery connected by a Verandah with room over, 6 Bedrooms, Dressing Room, Bathroom and WC.

It also included Cellarage, Glasshouses, Stabling for two horses, Carriage House, Harness Room, Potting House and enclosed yard.

The house was set back from the road, with a wall and holly hedge in front. It had a rough-cast gabled elevation and commanded extensive views.

The garden at the rear was well laid out with lawns, flower beds, an ornamental pool, formed by utilising the Ebrook, which ran through the grounds, and a kitchen garden. The property also had a secondary approach via a 'right of way' entrance, which led directly from the Parade.

Although excellent facilities existed, it is not known whether Edward James or any of his family kept any horses or even learnt to ride.

If they did so, it would have taken only a few minutes easy canter to reach either the Wyndley Pool or Town Gate entrances to Sutton Park.

The 1881 Census Return confirms Edward was living there with his complete family, together with Elizabeth Emms, a General Domestic Servant.

## **Land Purchase**

Early in the 1880's Edward Hill James decided his financial situation was such that he could now contemplate moving into a new house - one which was designed and constructed with his own needs fully in mind.

He and his family had been living in Sutton Coldfield at 'Manor Lodge' for approximately 10 years and Edward had come to like the area, with its surrounding countryside, the beautiful Sutton Park nearby and the easy accessibility to his place of business in the centre of Birmingham.

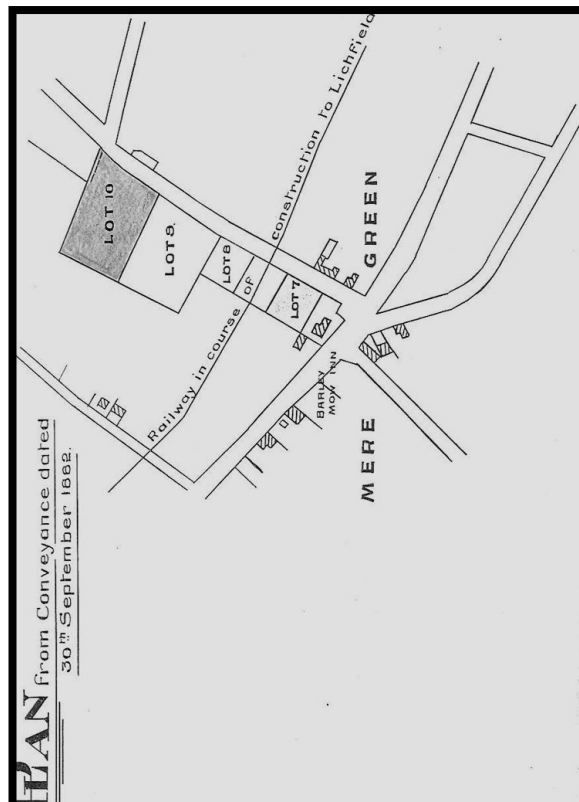
He began searching for land to purchase and finally found what he was looking for in Belwell Road, Four Oaks. No fewer than four plots became available in close proximity to each other, either side of the railway line from Sutton Coldfield to Lichfield, which was then in the course of construction.

Edward had always been a shrewd businessman and he considered the price of £1,640 to be a good investment, with land bound to increase in value once the railway was completed. This actually occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> December 1884, when the first passenger service came into operation.

Edward chose Plot 10 as being the most suitable for his own requirements. It stretched to approximately two acres, which ensured more than adequate privacy, especially in view of the fact in those days Belwell Road (later to be re-designated as Belwell Lane) was very quiet and rural. It was also close to the Four Oaks Estate and Sutton Park.



**Belwell Lane in the 1930's.**



**Plan showing the four parcels of land purchased by Edward James.  
Plot 10 being the one chosen for the building of his new residence.**

## **A New House**

His next step was to arrange for the commission of a suitable Architect to oversee the design process.

Edward eventually decided to appoint William Henman. It is not known whether this was the result of a recommendation or whether they knew each other, having developed an earlier relationship due to Edward's wine business.

William Henman was born in London in 1846 and was articled to his father, Charles Henman, in 1866, at the relatively mature age of 20. He then moved to the office of Thomas Hayter Lewis, whilst attending the Royal Academy School. He subsequently moved to the offices of Edward Sharpe and travelled in France before commencing independent practice in 1871 at Stockton-on-Tees, in partnership with John William Alexander.

He moved to Birmingham in 1879 and was admitted as an Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1881, his proposers being Thomas Hayter Lewis, Francis Cranmer Penrose and Ewan Christian. He was elected a Fellow on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 1895, his proposers being Francis Penrose, Alfred Waterhouse and Alfred Hale.



**William Henman, FRIBA (1846-1917).**

At the time he was appointed by Edward James, William Henman was in the process of building his reputation, having already designed, in neo-Queen Anne style, Handsworth Council House and Library, Soho Road, in 1880. He was later asked to design an extension to the building in 1891.

Not long after being involved in the house at Belwell Lane, Henman was appointed Architect for Birmingham General Hospital, Steelhouse Lane, Birmingham, the building of which commenced in 1894 and was completed in 1897. It was built in terracotta, in the Renaissance style.

This project was the making of him and he became a well known and respected Architect in his own right and also later, from 1898 onwards, in association with his partner William Cooper.

The practice specialised in the design of hospitals and they were subsequently associated with, amongst others:-

***The Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast. This hospital was a landmark construction at the time and laid claim to being the first 'air conditioned building' in the world' (1903).***

***Ramsey Cottage Hospital, Isle of Man (1907).***

William Henson also designed ***Nos. 85 & 87, Cornwall Street, Birmingham***, in the 'Arts & Crafts' style and the ***Birmingham Children's Hospital (1894-97)***.

Their offices were situated at 19, Temple Street, Birmingham.

The builder, chosen to construct the property in Belwell Lane, was John Barnsley & Sons and they were probably recommended by William Henson.

John Barnsley & Sons was a prominent Birmingham firm, which was founded by John Barnsley in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and was responsible for the construction of a number of major buildings, including:-

***Birmingham Council House (1874-79).***

***Highbury Hall, as the family home of Birmingham's famous parliamentarian the Rt. Hon. Joseph Chamberlain (1878-79).***

***Birmingham School of Art, Margaret Street (1881-85).***

***Birmingham Children's Hospital (1894-97).***

***Substantial alteration & extension work to the Grand Hotel, which included the construction of a ballroom (1895).***

***The Birmingham Hall of Memory (1923).***

The firm was well connected with the respected architectural firm of Martin & Chamberlain. Thomas Barnsley was taken into partnership by his father in the early 1860's and this happened to be about the same time as John Chamberlain began to practice as an Architect. Thomas Barnsley superintended the building of all the work Chamberlain designed in the early part of his career.

It might be said that both Architect and Builder combined to introduce the application of the principles of Gothic Architecture in Birmingham during this period.

Thomas Barnsley died in 1909.

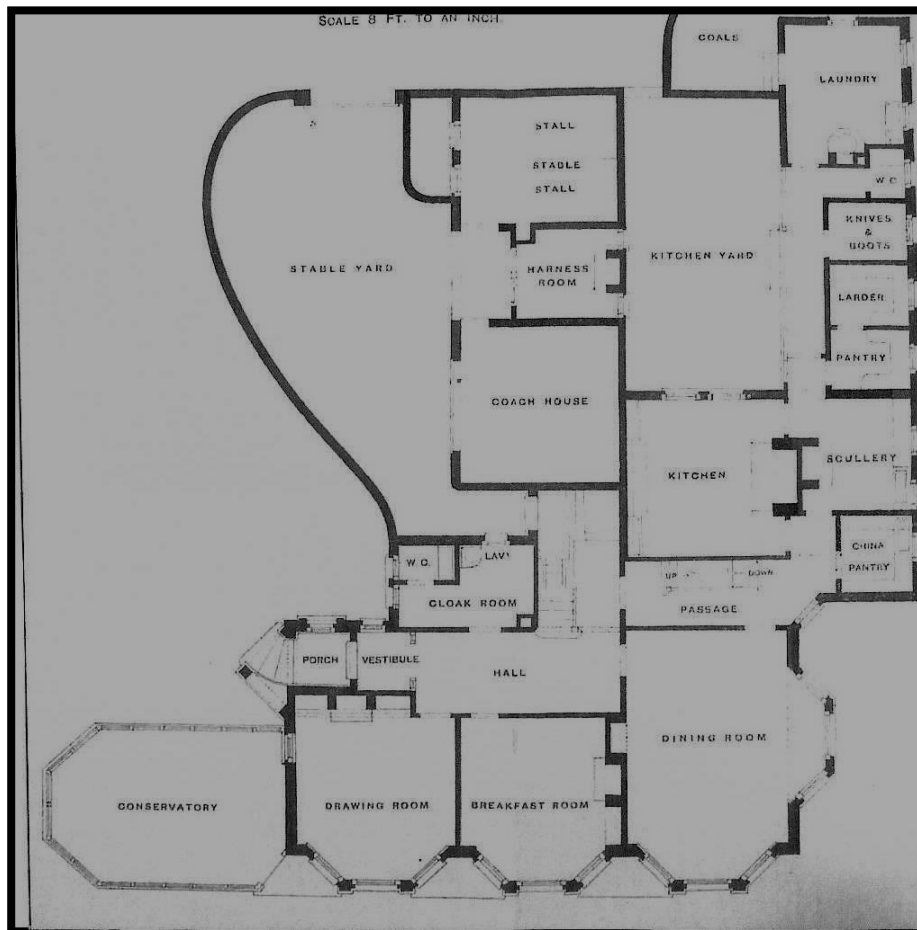
It can be seen from the aforementioned that Edward James had aligned himself with two real heavyweights in the architectural and building world and he obviously had no intention of 'cutting any corners' when it came to the construction of his new family home. It was thought at the time that he instructed them to proceed 'regardless of cost'! A situation almost unheard of in modern times.

After initial contact between the parties, a series of meetings would have been necessary, to ascertain the terms of reference and the exact needs of the Client.

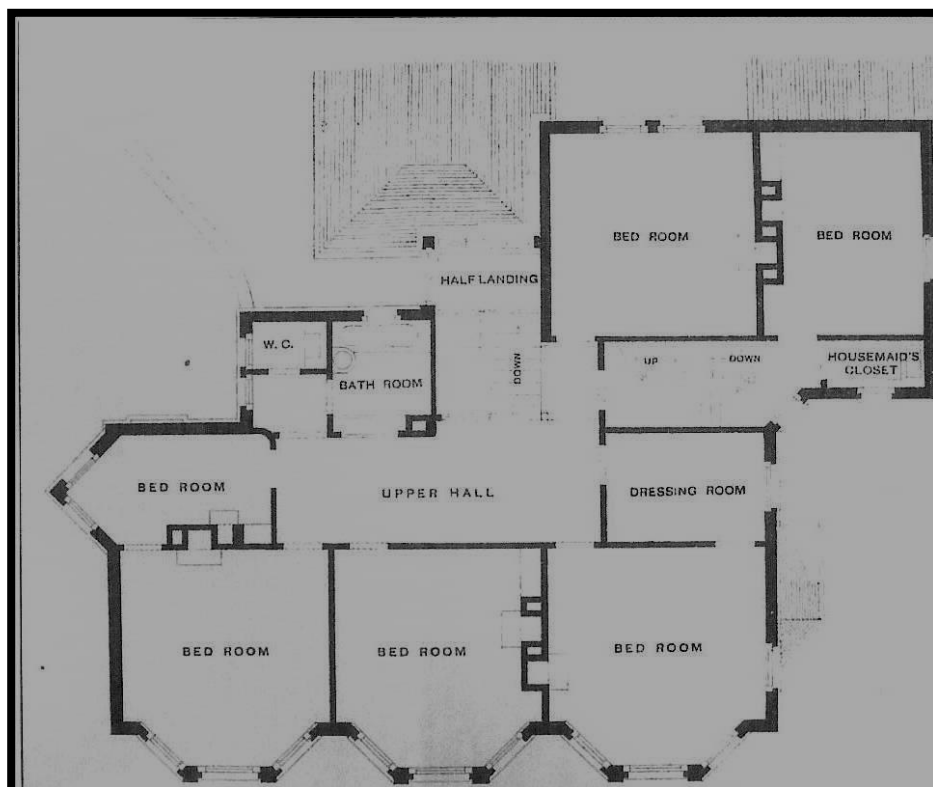
William Henson would have submitted various designs for approval, based upon the result of the discussions, and final agreement would eventually have been reached.

It would then have been the turn of the Builder to draw up a Bill of Quantities, in order to provide Edward James with an accurate figure for the construction costs involved. This would, of course, have been subject to a Final Account being prepared, upon completion of the work. At this point in time, any alterations to the original specification would have been noted, together with any unforeseen costs.

An official Contract would have been drawn up and signed and building work would have then commenced on an agreed date, thought to be during the period 1883/84.



**Ground Floor Plan of 'Chalford'.**



**First Floor Plan of 'Chalford'.**



The floor plans of the house show the property to be very substantial. On the **Ground Floor**, as part of the family living area, was a Porch, Vestibule, Hall, Conservatory, Drawing Room, Breakfast Room, Dining Room, Cloakroom & W.C. Also provided were a Stable Yard, Coach House, Harness Room and a Stable with stalls for two horses.

A Passage leading off the Hall led to the servants' quarters, which included Kitchen, China and Pantry Room, Scullery, a second Pantry with Larder off, Knives and Boots Room, W.C. & Laundry Room. Separate doors led out to the Kitchen Yard and Coals Storage.

A Half Basement was reached via stairs leading down from the servants' hall. This comprised Cellarage, a Carpenter's Shop, Cart Shed and Tool House.

On the **First Floor** was an Upper Hall or Landing, 6 Bedrooms, Dressing Room, Bathroom, W.C. & Housemaids' Closet.

On the **Second Floor** were 5 additional Bedrooms, a Box Room & a Tank Room.

Victorian houses in this category would often have contained a combination of the following features:-

### **Externally**

- (a) Bay windows were very fashionable. These usually had a flat frontage, with slanting sides and their own slate roof.
- (b) Plate glass came into production in 1832 and four and six pane vertical sliding sash windows soon became popular.
- (c) As the only way of heating the rooms was by means of wood or coal fires, fireplaces needed to be provided. These were often ostentatious, elaborate pieces made of cast iron.
- (d) Fireplaces meant chimneys were necessary and these sometimes resulted in fine examples, with beautiful brickwork designs.
- (e) Roofs were normally of Welsh slate, which are very expensive should they need to be replaced today.

### **Internally**

- (a) Victorians saw bathrooms as strictly functional places, but the classic roll-top bath with claw feet, are still extremely popular and sought after items today.
- (b) Kitchens were also designed to be functional and the main centerpiece here would have been a generous sized wooden table for the purpose of food preparation. A large range was usually provided for cooking purposes. Fully-fitted kitchens were simply not on the agenda and a separate scullery, with a large sink for cleaning the pots, pans, and plates etc., together with a walk-in larder were more the norm.
- (c) Carpets were made in rich, dark colours, heavily patterned with large three dimensional designs celebrating elements of nature – birds, flowers or geometric patterns. A perimeter of highly polished wood about two feet wide would be left around the edges of the room. Tiles were used in areas of heavy traffic, such as porches, vestibules, cloakrooms and conservatories.
- (d) Front doors were usually of hardwood with stained or etched glass panels. Stained glass was also popular in internal doors.
- (e) Victorians had a limited palette and so paintwork was usually restricted to strong colours such as ruby reds, deep forest greens, blues and purples.
- (f) The Victorian approach to paintings etc. was to put them all up and let each picture fight for itself! Strong notions of national identity and empire were reflected in regal portraits and romantic countryside scenes.

(g) Wallpaper came into general manufacture in the 1840's. Quality varied considerably from mass produced designs on wood-pulp paper to elaborate hand printed motifs on rag paper.

## **Layout of the Grounds**

A long driveway led up from Belwell Lane to the front entrance. This driveway was flanked by lime and horse chestnut trees, planted alternately. A large number of elm trees were also included in the original landscaping scheme, together with under planting of holly and rhododendron.

An unusual aspect of the external design to the front of the property was the siting there of the kitchen garden, greenhouses & potting shed.

At the rear of the house, a lawn sloped gently downwards. At the end of this was a low hedge with an opening leading to a second lawn. This was reached via two shallow steps, flanked by twin brick pillars supporting pedestals topped with fluted urns for flower displays. The lawn nearest to the house was planted with small ornamental trees and shrubs.

Pleasant areas to sit and admire the views were provided by the inclusion of numerous benches.

The lawn nearest to the house was planted with small ornamental trees & shrubs.

A pathway wound around the perimeter of the garden and beyond that were wide borders with plants, shrubs and additional trees.

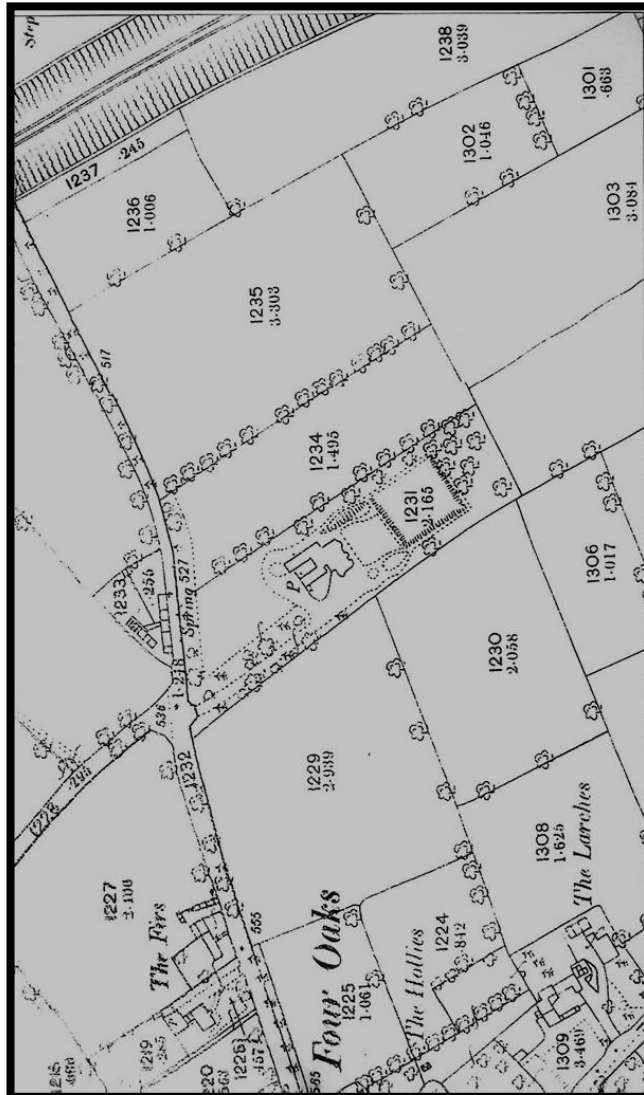
Upon the completion of his new house Edward James named it 'Chalford', after his place of birth.



**South view of 'Chalford' (rear elevation).**

## **An Enviably Location**

The position of 'Chalford' can clearly be seen on the 1888 Ordnance Survey Map, issued not long after the property was completed.



**Ordnance Survey Map – First Edition 1888.**

From this map, it is easy to gauge why Edward James chose the plot in question, as it enjoyed a very desirable situation. It was not overlooked at the front or rear of the property and, in actual fact, with the exception of 'The Firs' a little further up Belwell Lane on the opposite side of the road, there were no other dwellings, other than the ones fronting onto Four Oaks Road.

Edward enjoyed the 'best of both worlds' as, despite its rural location, 'Chalford' was quite close to the centre of Sutton Coldfield and shops were opening just a short distance away at Mere Green.

## **Grand Opening**

Upon the completion of 'Chalford', Edward James may well have decided to mark the occasion by having a grand opening. In this way he would have been able to invite his friends, relatives, business colleagues and clients.

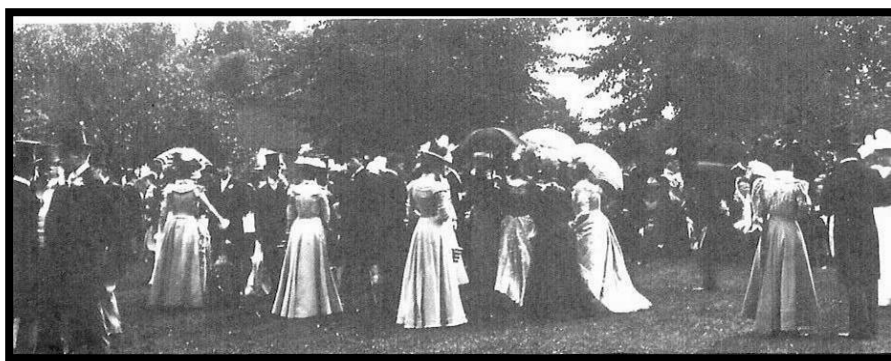
For a businessman like Edward, it would have been just too good an opportunity to miss and, although it cannot be substantiated, he may have coupled this with a garden party in the grounds.

‘Etiquette’ was the one word which aptly described life in the reign of Queen Victoria. It would therefore have been ‘etiquette’ for Edward to have done this.

Imagine the scene therefore on the day of the garden party, with the ladies in their long sweeping dresses and holding their parasols to protect their pale complexions from the sun. The men in their top hats, long frock coats and leaning upon their silver topped canes.

Being in the wine and spirit trade, one could be sure there would have been no shortage of alcoholic beverages!

In the evening, after a pleasant meal, perhaps the ladies would have retired to the Drawing Room to gossip over this and that. The gentlemen, after the table had been cleared, may have remained in the Dining Room to discuss the problems of the day over a good glass of claret or port and a cigar, followed perhaps by a game of cards.



Wedding reception in the grounds of the ‘Grange’, Erdington, July 1899.

## **Victorian Times**

For those in the Upper and Middle classes of society, rules such as proper behavior, the proper forms of address and even what to wear were considered very important.

From the slightest social error to how a gentleman spoke to a young lady, Victorians were greatly concerned with every aspect of daily life. From the moment they left their beds, their days were governed by ‘do’s and don’ts’.

The horror of social ostracism was paramount. To be caught in the wrong fashion at the wrong part of the day was as greatly feared as addressing a member of society by the wrong title.

It was important to know whom you could speak with, especially if you hadn’t been properly introduced. For a woman, being asked to dance by a complete stranger could pose a problem of etiquette, which might have caused repercussions and gossip for days.

Young ladies were constantly chaperoned. To be found alone with a gentleman who was other than family was tantamount to social death. Her reputation would be ruined and her gentleman companion would have found himself the object of gossip and perhaps derision.

The established career for women in this category was marriage – full stop. They were expected to represent their husbands with grace and provide absolutely no scandal. Charity work would have been accepted, including sewing for the poor and putting together food baskets.

Gentlemen had to keep track of when it was proper to either smoke or have a glass of sherry in front of ladies. When to bow and to whom one should tip one’s hat, could cause gossip if the wrong decision was made.

The saying '*Clothes maketh the man*' is a phrase which could easily have been coined during the Victorian period. Victorian clothes were very much a symbol of who you were, what you did for a living and how much money was in your bank account.

Etiquette also played a major part in Victorian clothing. It was considered 'good etiquette' to dress appropriately to one's age and position in society.

To have a parasol or umbrella was a social-scale barometer. The wealthy purchased theirs, whilst the general public would rent one if the weather turned wet.

For men it was considered their dress was not complete without a walking stick or cane. Some canes contained compartments which were useful for holding vials of cologne.

Although the material for Victorian clothes was manufactured, ready-made outfits were unknown. Seamstresses and tailors were responsible for custom-made creations. Milliners, Glovers and Hatters would help complete the look.

Throughout the era, Victorian fashion changed dramatically. Skirts went from straight to being spread over large hoops. At the end of the period, the hoop had disappeared from view and it was back to slimmer skirts, although now sporting a bustle at the rear.

Head gear had a style all of its own, with large lavishly decorated hats, covered with feathers, lace and flowers.

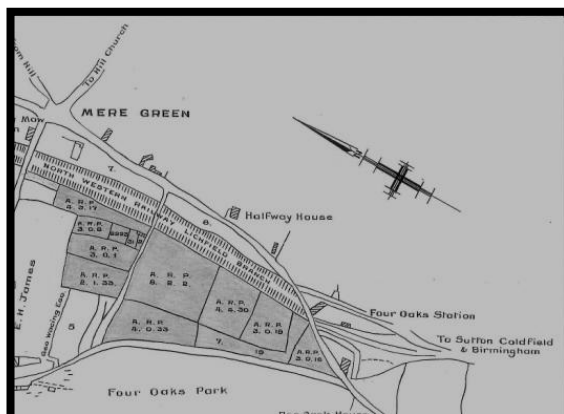
With regards to the corset, however, this design element never varied. To wear Victorian dress, it was necessary to have a cinched-in waist. For younger ladies, having a waist the same as your age was the aim. Seventeen years old? That meant you should strive for a 17" waist! Older ladies were allowed more leeway.

For men, Victorian style didn't go in for such radical changes. Coat lengths, however, did vary over time and the cinching of the waist gave way to a more loosely fitting jacket. The elegant dress-coat for the day slowly gave way to a long frock coat, usually black.

## **Further Land Purchases**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1888, Edward James completed the purchase of another large parcel of land owned jointly by Sir Charles Edward Cradock Hartopp of Aston Flamville, Leics., the Rt. Hon. Walter Charles Montague Douglas Scott of 3 Grosvenor Crescent, Middlesex and Thomas Charles Douglas Whitmore Esq. of Gurmley Hall, Market Harborough, Leics.

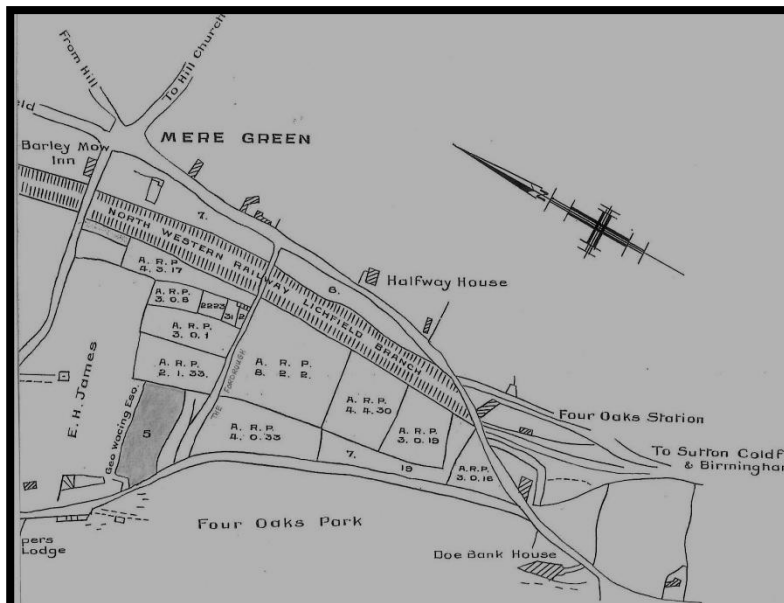
The overall sum involved amounted to £3,500 and the land covered a substantial, triangular shaped, area of land situated between the newly built railway line to Lichfield and Four Oaks Road.



**Plan showing land purchased by Edward Hill James on the 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1888.**

Later the next year, in 1889, he purchased a further plot of land, together with the right to pass over 'The Fordrough' and the road beside it, for a figure of £1,815.

'The Fordrough' is still in existence and forms a right of way between Four Oaks Road and Lichfield Road, where it exits almost opposite Cremorne Road.



**Plan showing land purchased by Edward Hill James in 1889.**

In Edward's Will, dated the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1903, he authorized the Trustees to 'develop and lay out for building and to make new roads upon any of his freehold land left in trust for the family'.

Eventually, during the mid 1950's onwards, the Trustees at the time sold the main parcels of land to developers and this resulted in the formation of:-

***Irnham Road  
Midgley Drive  
Hawkesford Close  
Pine Leigh  
and  
Beechcroft Court Apartments.***

## **1891 Census**

A few years after moving into 'Chalford' the Census for 1891 was completed. From this record it can be ascertained that, besides Edward and his wife Lucy, five of their children were still residing with them. Only his elder son Benjamin James had moved out. He was now living nearby in Four Oaks Road, Sutton Coldfield.

In addition to the family, no fewer than three domestic servants were noted as living at the premises, namely:-

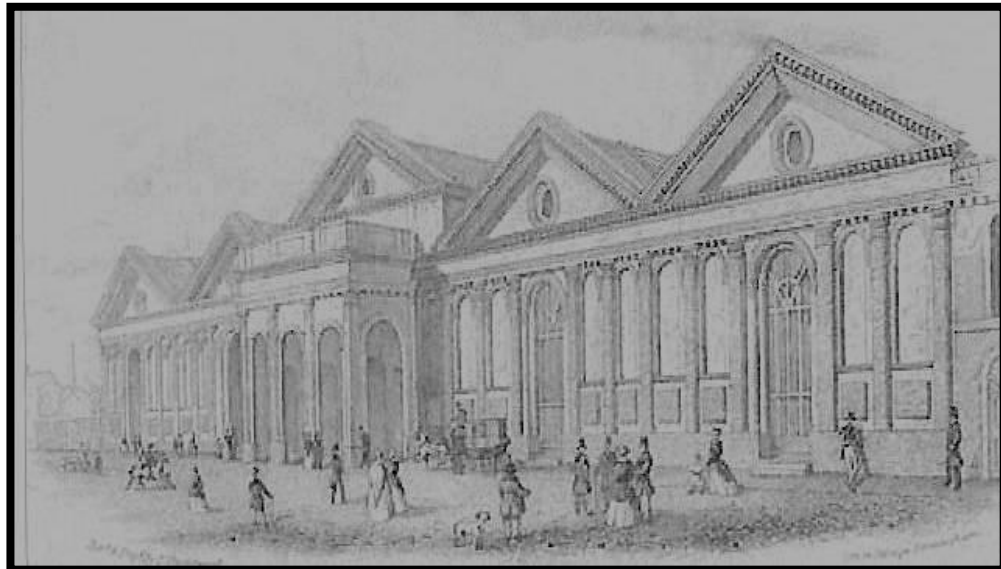
***Harriet Hamer of Belbroughton in Worcestershire.  
Jane Wakefield of Teddington in Warwickshire.  
Mary Ann Steadman of Dudley in Worcestershire.***

Two of the James's daughters (Alice & Kitty) were, as yet, unmarried but Agnes had married someone with the memorable name of Frank Tyrrell Bakewell Edkins. His occupation was a Clerk and he was from Droitwich in Worcestershire. They were both residing at 'Chalford', together with their young son Charles, aged one year.

Finally, on the day the Census was taken, Frederick Wearing was indicated as being there as a visitor to the house. He was aged 24 from West Bromwich and he too was described as a Clerk. He was almost certainly visiting Alice James as, two years later, they married in 1893.

## **Bingley Hall Exhibition**

In 1893 the firm of *E H James* agreed to have a stand at the 'Brewers' and Distillers' First Annual Exhibition 'being held at the Bingley Hall, Broad Street, Birmingham, between the 13<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup> April.



**Bingley Hall, Broad Street, Birmingham.**

**E. H. JAMES'S SPECIAL EXHIBITION CIRCULAR.**

**THE BREWERS' AND DISTILLERS' FIRST ANNUAL EXHIBITION**

— TO BE HELD IN —

**BINGLEY HALL, BIRMINGHAM, from APRIL 13th to 22nd.**

**LIST OF SPECIAL OFFERS.**

READ IT CAREFULLY THROUGH AND COMPARE PRICES

Telegraphic Address—“DISTILLER, BIRMINGHAM.” Telephone No. 877.

Samples of all the following goods will be on show at the “BREWERS' AND DISTILLERS' EXHIBITION” in E. H. JAMES'S sampling room, nearly opposite the main entrance, and exactly opposite the way out.

Orders to view the goods in bond, free samples, and all other information, may be had either at 29 Dale End, or at the Exhibition, Bingley Hall, between April 13th and 22nd. E. H. JAMES will be very pleased to show samples to anyone, whether they are buyers or not, the utmost attention will be paid to all who visit the Exhibition.

These goods are specially selected from E. H. JAMES'S stock for sale at the Exhibition in Bingley Hall, in each case the very lowest possible price is quoted, free from commissions or any other charge whatever. It must be distinctly understood that in many instances I cannot continue to supply the same goods at these prices as they are nearly all from stocks which I have purchased at a large discount for cash.

**Poster issued by *E H James* to advertise their stand at the 1893 Exhibition.**

It was a good sized stand, located in a most favourable position near to the main entrance of the exhibition hall. The stand also contained a Sample Room, where various wines and spirits handled by the firm could be tasted, which would have proved extremely popular to visitors!



*E H James' stand at the Bingley Hall Exhibition 1893.*

## **An Eye for a Bargain.**

In addition to being a level-headed businessman, Edward James also had an 'eye for a bargain'.

He seemed to have made very good profits by purchasing ship-wrecked goods in bulk and selling them at discounted rates.

Marine salvage is the process of rescuing a ship, its cargo, or other property from peril. Salvage incorporates rescue towing, refloating a sunken or grounded vessel, or patching or repairing a ship. If the ship cannot be saved, then the valuable parts of the vessel or its cargo may be recovered for its resale value, or for scrap.

Two words, which found their way into the dictionary and became household words, originate from ships being in distress, they are:-

- a) **Flotsam** – Goods which floated off the ship, whilst it was in danger or when it sank.
- b) **Jetsam** – Goods which are thrown off the ship.

Two instances, in which Edward James became involved with the salvage business, were the following:-

### **SHIP WRECK AT MILFORD HAVEN**

The Pembrokeshire coast and islands are very dangerous for shipping and, at the last count, there are around 500 wrecks in the area.

The 'Loch Shiel' was shipwrecked on the 30<sup>th</sup> January 1894 on the seaward side of Thorn Island, near Milford Haven on an outbound-bound passage to Adelaide, Australia.

The vessel was a 3 masted fully rigged ship, which was built at Glasgow in 1877. She was 225 feet in length and manufactured of wood and iron. She carried a cargo of rock and kelp, together with 7,000 cases of spirit and general merchandise.



It broke up on the sea bed at a depth of between 10-15 meters.

The firm of *E H James* purchased two consignments from this wreck. The latter being described as 'exceedingly valuable and fine Old Scotch Whiskies'.

Telephone 977. Telegraphic Address:—"DISTILLER, BIRMINGHAM."

29 DALE END,  
BIRMINGHAM,  
August, 1894.

### ANOTHER LARGE PURCHASE OF SALVAGE WHISKEY

EX STEAMSHIP "LOCH-SHIEL"

E. H. JAMES has just purchased a second consignment of exceedingly valuable and fine Old Scotch Whiskies saved from the wreck of the "Loch-Shiel," which stranded near Milford Haven, on an outward-bound passage to Adelaide, Melbourne, and other Australian ports, in March last.

The following is the stock; the earliest application is essential to secure orders. Quality guaranteed perfect.

— Terms:—NET CASH.—

	Per Case in Bond.	Per Case Duty Paid.
253 Cases Andrew Usher's O.V.G. (Old Vatted Glenlivet) Special Reserve, 14 U.P. ....	18/6	36/-
252 Cases Andrew Usher's O.V.G. (Old Vatted Glenlivet), 14 U.P. ....	17/-	34/-
83 Cases Andrew Usher's O.V.G. (Old Vatted Glenlivet), 20 U.P. ....	14/-	32/-
325 Cases John Walker's, Kilmarnock, Old Highland Whiskey, 14 U.P. ....	17/6	35/-
87 Cases "The Apex Blend" Fine Old Scotch Whiskey, 21 U.P. ....	10/-	27/-
36 Cases "The Clan Chattan," Fine Old Highland Whiskey, 17 U.P. ....	11/-	29/-
20 Cases Finest Old Blended Glenlivet Whiskey (Slater, Rodger & Co.), 17 U.P. ....	12/-	30/-
12 Cases "The Thistle" Blend of Fine Old Scotch (Slater, Rodger & Co.), 20 U.P. ....	11/-	28/-
15 Cases "The Clans" Blend, Old Scotch (Ross, McKenzie & Co.), 17 U.P. ....	11/6	29/-

*E H James* Poster dated August 1894.

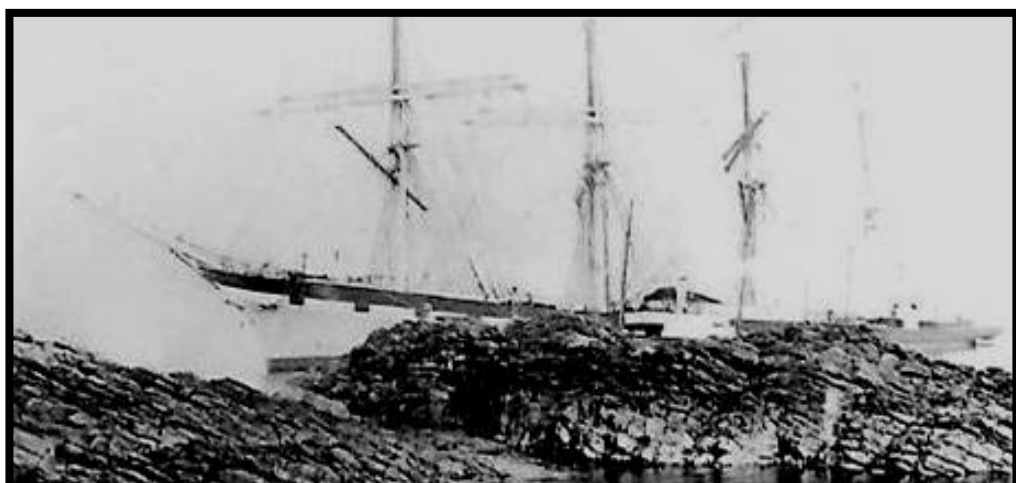
## SHIP WRECK AT ALDERNEY

Wrecked vessels often provided the Channel Islanders with some rich pickings, as a variety of cargoes were washed ashore. In some cases looters helped themselves from stranded ships.

The four masted 'Liverpool' was one of the largest and most beautiful ships to come to grief.

The vessel was wrecked at Alderney in the Channel Islands during an outbound passage from Antwerp to San Francisco on the 25<sup>th</sup> February 1902. *E H James* purchased most of the cargo of wines and spirits. The cargo included 89 octaves and 26 hogsheads of Brandy, 164 casks of Port and Sherry, 26 hogsheads of Claret, 101 casks of Whisky and 2,202 cases of various spirits.

The poster actually shows a picture of the vessel in question aground on the rocks.



Part of the Poster produced by *E H James*, Dated 1902.

## Magazine Article.

In the early 1900's, Edward James, on behalf of his firm, approached the 'Brewer and Publican' magazine. He suggested, if they wished to write an article based upon his Bonded Stores and Duty Paid Warehouses, he would offer them unrestricted access.

Edward James was delighted when the magazine accepted his proposal, as he knew he stood to gain by the free publicity which would automatically accrue.

The 'Brewer and Publican' decided to proceed by way of a special supplement.

In the somewhat flowery language, which was prevalent in those days, the article began:-

*It would be difficult to discover a better result of a continuous application of enterprise and energy to a business than that which characterises the wine and spirit trade of our old townsman, Mr Edward Hill James. More than 40 years ago Mr James commenced in the trade, and many of our oldest citizens will remember his premises in Ann Street, which have long since been swept away to make room for some of the large buildings in Colmore Row. It was thus he was forced into the recognized trade quarter of the city, viz., 29 Dale End, where for many years he has carried on the trade of a wholesale dealer in wines and spirits.*

The journalist went on to say:-

*In accepting Mr. James's cordial invitation to inspect his warehouses and bonded stores, and to learn 'how the thing worked', we find ourselves in a position to interest our readers with an experience of half a day 'amongst the spirits', for indeed we must confess we were highly interested with what we saw and learned.*

*Upon arriving at 29 Dale End, on a bright, cold September morning, we were shown by an assistant into the sample room, where we await the appearance of our host. This room the assistant informs us, contains a duplicate sample of the whole of the goods which lie in the bonded stores at Worcester Wharf, in Suffolk Street and when we were told that the shelves and cupboards contain something like four thousand samples, we commenced to realise the immense stock in bond; so perfect is the system of arranging these samples that any particular one can be found momentarily by reference to the sample room book.*

*An electric bell announces that Mr. James is waiting in his private office to meet us, and after ascending an old-fashioned oak staircase we make the acquaintance of the head of the business, who, to judge by the heaps of papers and samples on his desk, has been having a lively hour with the letters, which arrived by the early post; these are soon all taken away by the shorthand clerk, who has received definite instructions as to disposal of the more intricate replies.*

*We were at once at home with Mr. James's congenial and business-like manner. We ventured to suggest the query:- How is it Mr. James that we hear so much about your business and see so many of your trade circulars, and yet we never either meet you or any of your travellers or agents? The reply is promptly given.*

***"I keep no travellers or agents, there are quite enough, goodness only knows, without mine. I simply stay at home and mind my own business, and it would be a great boon to the Trade if others did the same."***

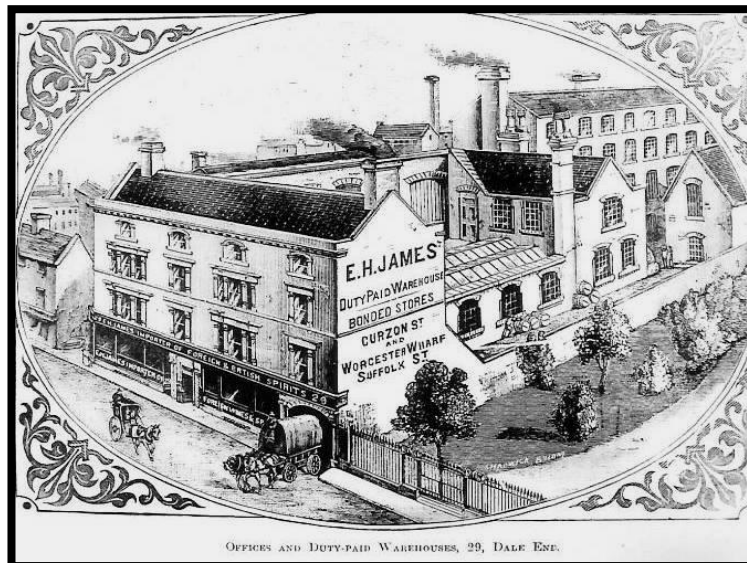
*But, we ask, how do you contrive to 'go ahead' in these times of keen competition without representatives to show your goods?*

***"It is perfectly simple," he says; "I buy all my goods in the leading markets for cash, and offer them with a small commission by circular every three months to the Trade only, on the same terms. I keep down all working expenses as much as possible and give my friends the benefit of my purchases."***

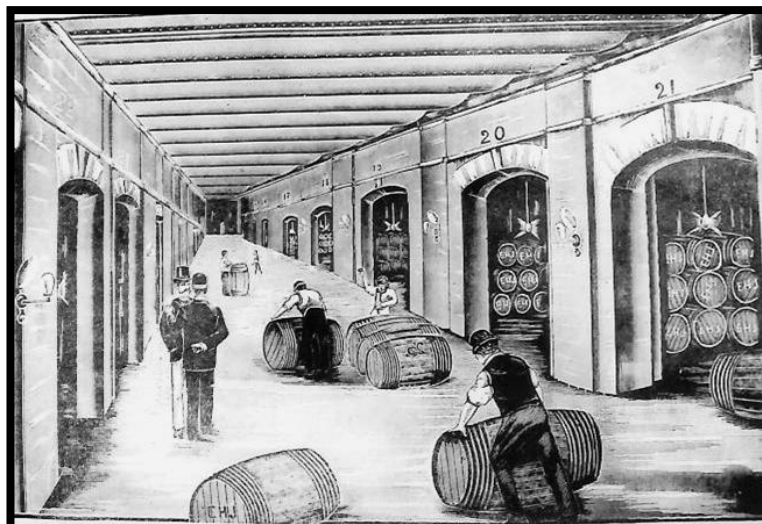
*We are here prompted to suggest that there are many innkeepers and publicans who are very highly prejudiced against buying goods at low prices, as many foster the idea that it means a corresponding low quality, to which Mr. James replies:-*

*“I am quite aware of this sort of thing, and of the ignorance which induces it, but my system is gradually finding its level, and I am now pleased to tell you that many, who have been kept from me partly from prejudice, and partly by the malicious reports of travellers, have at last found out that their interests are best served in purchasing their goods free from the heavy commission paid to agents and travellers. I find prejudice among publicans is one of the most difficult matters I have to deal with. You will scarcely believe it to be true, but still it is a fact, that some of the largest buyers – I don’t confine myself strictly to publicans – will readily give London, Belfast, or Liverpool firms a far away higher price for their goods than they can obtain the identical brands for from my own stock.”*

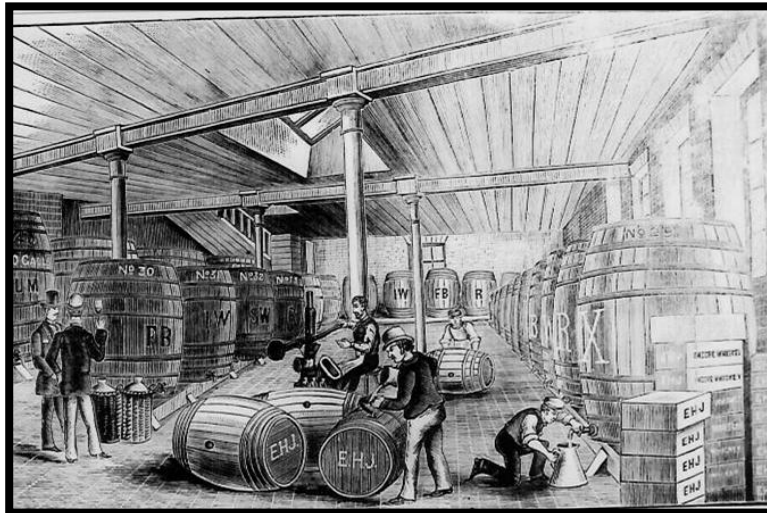
The writer then moved on to describe to his readers the tour of the bonded warehouses in the company of Edward James. The article also included some fine engraved pictures, some of which can be found below.



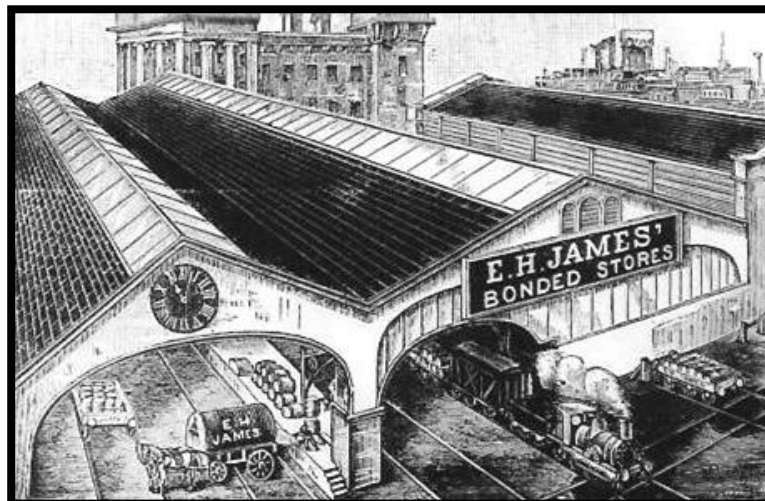
Offices and Duty Paid Warehouses, 29, Dale End, Birmingham.



E H James's Private Bonded Stores, Worcester Wharf, Suffolk Street.



**First Floor of Duty Paid Spirit Warehouse, Worcester Wharf, Suffolk Street.**



**Bonded Stores, Curzon Street, Birmingham.**

## **Death of the Founder.**

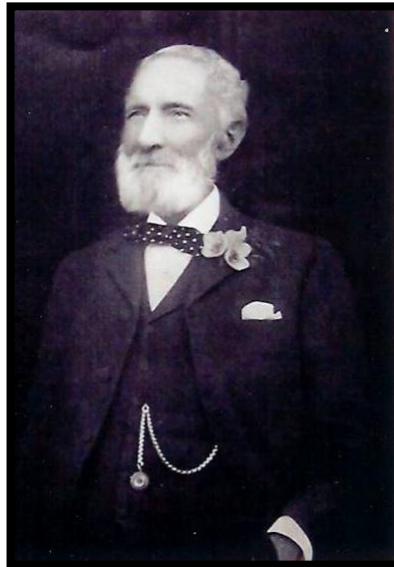
From a lowly beginning, Edward James forged for himself and his family, a life of privilege and comfort. Through hard work, calculated risks and innovation, he became a respected businessman, in what was his adopted city of Birmingham.

He sadly died aged 76 on the 25<sup>th</sup> April 1904 at 'Chalford', his home in Belwell Lane, Four Oaks. He survived his wife Lucy by less than 12 months, she having died the previous year, aged 74.

He had instructed his Solicitors, Jacob Rowlands & Son of 121 Colmore Row, Birmingham to draw up his Last Will & Testament, to ensure his affairs were in order. This occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> September 1903 and it may well have been the death of his wife that triggered this action.

As befitted his stature as a successful Wine and Spirit Merchant, Edward left a substantial amount in his Will.

The Gross Value of his personal estate totaled £60,709 1s 10d and, after settlement of all his outstanding debts, the Net Value stood at £36,830 10s 2d.



**Edward Hill James (1827-1904) – Founder of the firm.**

By present day standards, this figure does not at first appear to have any great significance. If one, however, calculates the equivalent amount say 100 years later in 2004, based upon the value of the pound in 1904, it would be worth over £2M. Each pound then being equal to £56.85 today, which puts his wealth fully into context.

It should also be born in mind that this only related to his personal fortune, as it did not include anything related to his business activities.

Just over a month after his death, on the 31<sup>st</sup> May 1904, Probate was granted and the executors and beneficiaries of his will were his six children, who were listed, as follows:-

*Laura Mary James  
Benjamin James.  
Edward Hill James (Jnr).  
Alice Lucy Wearing.  
Agnes Gertrude Edkins.  
Kitty Elizabeth James.*

*of 'Chalford'  
of Sutton Coldfield  
of 'Westmoor', Four Oaks  
of Carters Green, West Bromwich  
of 83 Park Avenue, Hull  
of 'Chalford'*

*Spinster.  
Wine & Spirit Merchant.  
Wine & Spirit Merchant.  
Wife of Frederick Charles Wearing.  
Wife of Frank Tyrrell Bakewell Edkins.  
Spinster.*

His two sons, Benjamin and Edward Hill (Jnr), who had worked in the family business since they were boys, succeeded him.



**Edward Hill James and his family. His two sons Edward Hill James (Jnr) & Benjamin James can be seen on his right.**

## **Public Auction**

As, by this time, they were both owners of their own properties in Sutton Coldfield, it was decided that 'Chalford' was surplus to requirements and should be sold, together with all the contents therein.

The firm of Grimley & Son, Auctioneers and Valuers of 39-40 Temple Street, Birmingham were instructed to handle all the necessary arrangements.

A full Inventory & Valuation was made of the Household Furniture and Effects on the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1904, which totaled £422.8s.0d. (worth approximately £24,000 by present day standards).

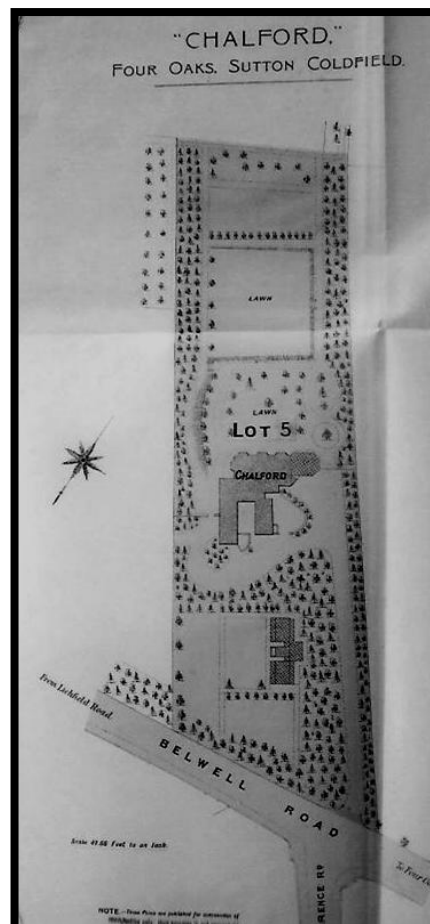
Mr James's property interests were divided into 5 Lots and these were sold via public auction. This took place at the Grand Hotel, Colmore Row, Birmingham on Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> June 1904 commencing at 7.00pm.



**Grand Hotel, Colmore Row, Birmingham, from St. Phillip's Churchyard.**

The various Lots were listed, as follows:-

- LOT 1.** Leasehold Ground Rents of £45.9s.10d per annum on Retail Shops & other Buildings situate the Parade, Sutton Coldfield.
- LOT 2.** Leasehold Residence, known as 'Manor Lodge', Manor Road, Sutton Coldfield.
- LOT 3.** Freehold Full-Licensed Public House, known as the 'Hope & Anchor', 18 New Street, Stourport, together with Retail Shop and Dwelling House.
- LOT 4.** Freehold Property, known as the 'Salmon Tavern', 40 Severn Street, Birmingham, together with two adjoining Dwelling Houses, 111 & 112 Suffolk Street, Birmingham.
- LOT 5.** Freehold Family Residence, known as 'Chalford', Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield.



Plan of 'Chalford' (LOT 5) in 1904.

Particulars, with Plans and Views,  
OF  
**VALUABLE PROPERTIES**  
AND  
**INVESTMENTS**  
COMPREHENDING AN  
Improved Leasehold Ground Rent  
Of £45 9s. 10d. per annum, secured by Property in  
THE PARADE, SUTTON COLDFIELD;  
FREE HOME-BREWING  
Freehold Fully-licensed Public House  
"THE HOPE AND ANCHOR," No. 18, NEW ST., STOURPORT,  
WITH  
A RETAIL SHOP AND DWELLING HOUSE;  
**FREEHOLD PROPERTY**  
"THE SALMON TAVERN," Fully-licensed, No. 40, SEVERN STREET,  
WITH  
ADJOINING HOUSES IN SUFFOLK STREET, BIRMINGHAM;  
Desirable Modern Freehold Residence  
"CHALFORD," FOUR OAKS, SUTTON COLDFIELD;  
AND AN  
Attractive Leasehold Residence  
"MANOR LODGE," MANOR ROAD, SUTTON COLDFIELD;  
To be Sold by Auction by Messrs.

---

**GRIMLEY AND SON**

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On THURSDAY, JUNE 30th, 1904.  
AT THE GRAND HOTEL, COLMORE ROW, BIRMINGHAM.  
AT 7 O'CLOCK TO THE MINUTE.

---

SOLE AGENTS—  
Messrs. JACOB ROYLANDS & SON,  
141, Colmore Row, Birmingham.

AUCTIONEERS' OFFICE—  
29 & 31, Temple Street,  
Birmingham.

Auctioneers particulars of the sale held at the Grand Hotel.



## **A Decision to Re-Build.**

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, the premises situate: 29 Dale End had originally been built as a dwelling house and, although it had been substantially adapted for business use, it was really not ideal for a firm which wished to continue to expand.

The brothers therefore made their first major decision, less than two years after the death of their father. They came to the conclusion that a complete re-build was necessary, specially designed for the wine and spirit trade, including extensive cellars.

Although there is nothing to substantiate the fact, it was highly likely William Henson and John Barnsley were both involved in the design and construction.

Most of the old property was demolished, although certain portions of the original premises were integrated into the new. The building work was completed in 1906 and it remained unaltered for the duration of the existence of the firm.



**The new premises of *E H James*, Dale End, Birmingham - Circa 1906.**



**Views of front & side elevations of new premises, with delivery van.**



## **First & Second World Wars**

The advent of the First World War in 1914 proved to be the start of a difficult time for the firm. The demand for wines and spirits, in a time of shortage and high wages, exceeded the available supplies.

The men, who had been employed at the firm's headquarters at Dale End, were drafted into the army and the business was carried on with part-time assistance and two Belgian refugees.

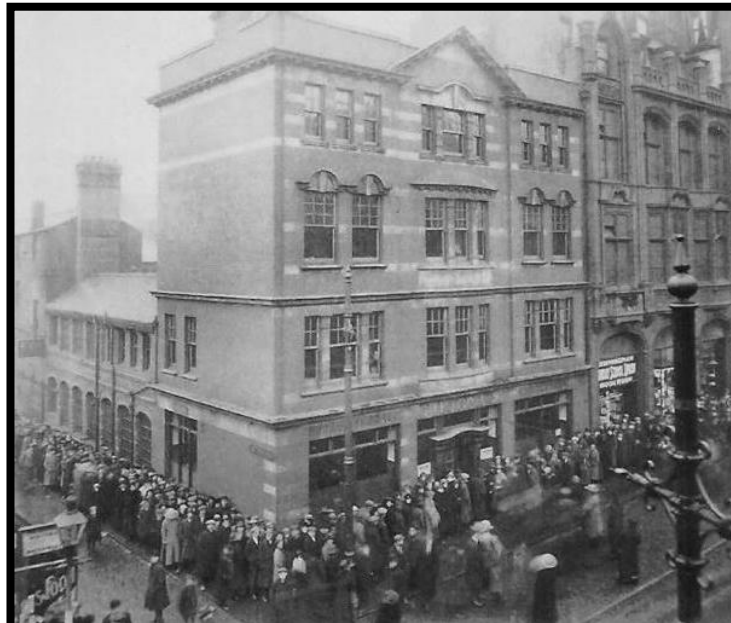
Benjamin James died in 1917, at the relatively early age of 57 and Cecil Hill James had to leave school to help in the business.



**Benjamin James. (1860-1917)**

Edward Antrobus James, after serving in the army in the latter part of the war, joined his father Edward Hill James (Jnr) and brother in 1919.

Fortunately, after the war ended, conditions returned to normal relatively quickly and business subsequently proceeded without any major upheavals, although signs of a change in trading conditions became apparent during the 1930's.



**View outside the premises of *E H James*, only a month after the end of the First World War – Christmas 1918.**

In 1939, upon the outbreak of World War II, E. A. James, who had been serving in the Territorial Army since 1920, was called away from the business to begin a six year period of active service. He was unlucky enough therefore to have been involved in two world wars.

Conditions were far more difficult this time than during the First World War. Imported wines and spirits were very scarce and, naturally, there were no supplies at all from Germany and the occupied countries. The distillation of Scotch Whiskey decreased and finally stopped altogether in 1943.

The same staffing problems also arose as before, with employees called away to serve in the various branches of the armed forces. The business this time was kept going by Edward Hill James (Jnr), a clerk and part-time assistant.

The German Air Force attacked Birmingham on numerous occasions and bombs destroyed many buildings around 29 Dale End, but the premises itself suffered no direct hits and the only damage was some broken glass, as a result of a nearby blast.

The end of the war found the business, like all others, working under extremely difficult conditions. There was a shortage of stock and other business machinery & equipment etc. and it was some years before the problems were resolved and business returned to something like normal. Wines were imported and allocated to traders on a quota system until 1949. Scotch Whiskey was not in free supply until as late as 1959.

Edward Hill James (Jnr) died in 1947, after a fall at the business premises, where he was still working every day at the age of 85.



**Edward Hill James (Jnr). (1862-1947)**

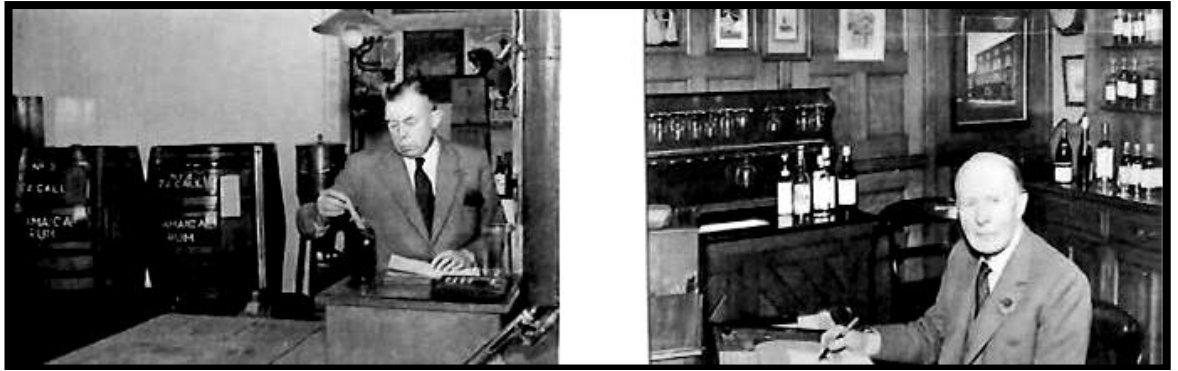
His two sons Edward Antrobus & Cecil Hill James continued to run the business in partnership. In 1957 they formed it into a Limited Company, but remained the sole proprietors of the firm.

The change in trading conditions, mentioned earlier, became more marked in the post-war years and the pattern of the wine and spirit trade changed completely from when the firm celebrated its Jubilee in 1911.

However, for the next 11 years the brothers continued to ensure the smooth running of the firm, including the responsibility of celebrating the centenary of *E H James Limited*, in 1961.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> July 1968 Cecil James took the momentous decision to marry. His bride was a Mrs. Greta Bartlett, who lived nearby in Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield and, at the age of 66, he also indicated the wish to retire.

By this time, his brother Edward was 69 and it was mutually agreed the business should be wound down.



**Cecil Hill James & Edward Antrobus James.**

On the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1968, Edward wrote to an established firm of Whiskey Brokers in Edinburgh, for their advice on the disposal of their bonded stock of Scotch Whiskey.

On the 5<sup>th</sup> November, he advised the Editor of Harpers Wine and Spirit Gazette of the fact the firm, started by his grandfather 107 years ago, was on the point of closing. He asked if they would kindly give notice to the Trade.

Chesshire Gibson & Co. was requested to offer the premises for sale and the doors of *E H James Limited* closed for the last time on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1968.



**Views of the Bottle Washing Room & General Office.**

Many of the old business records were donated to the Birmingham Reference Library, the cooper's tools went to the Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery and a library of books, papers & maps were sold to another Wine Merchant, after placing an advertisement in Harpers.

## **CHAPTER 2.**

### **MILLICENT MARY RYLAND & FAMILY.**

#### **(Second Occupant)**

Millicent Ryland was the second occupant of 'Chalford'.

The Sutton Coldfield Burgess Roll indicates she resided there between 1907 and 1909.

#### **The Ryland Family**

Millicent came from the wealthy and influential Ryland family, who owned a well-known Birmingham manufacturing company.

Her Grandfather, Thomas Ryland, was born on the 21<sup>st</sup> November 1818. He married Mary Proctor on the 28<sup>th</sup> July 1841.

They had 11 children in all, five sons and six daughters.

They initially resided at 'The Redlands', Gravelly Hill, Erdington. The property was an imposing mansion, having wide lawns and well manicured, formal flowerbeds.



**'The Redlands', Gravelly Hill, Erdington. The home of Thomas Ryland.**

In 1873, it is recorded that Thomas Ryland owned a little over 10 acres of land in the Erdington area, with a gross estimated annual rental of £243.00. A very substantial income calculated on today's values. This was, of course, in addition to his other business interests.

Today, there is a Ryland Road situated in the Gravelly Hill area, which it is thought to be named after him.

The family's fortune, gathered over the generations, was due, in part, to good marriages and connections, coupled with privileged education. They were also involved, at various times, with wire drawing, agricultural fertiliser manufacture and land holdings.

In 1881, Thomas Ryland, whilst still retaining his property at 'The Redlands', acquired Moxhull Park and Moxhull Hall. He also, at the same time, purchased the adjacent Manor of Wishaw. The estates extended to over a thousand acres.

Thomas Ryland was described as a *"frank gentleman, with a merry, twinkling eye, speaking of a deep-seated humour; a man towards whom one would feel irresistibly drawn."*

*He has a quiet, dignified sedateness that evokes respect; a practical mind; a good, sound, independent judgment; an acute perception of truthfulness; a firm sense of equity; a liberal, benevolent heart; full of generosity; in fact, a gentleman universally esteemed”.*



**Mr. Thomas Ryland.**

His wife, Mary, sadly passed away on the 31<sup>st</sup> October 1872. Her memorial, however, can be found occupying the whole south transept window in the Church of St. Martin's in the Bullring, Birmingham. This window was commissioned by Thomas in 1876 from Sir Edward Burne-Jones and was manufactured in the studios of William Morris.

Thomas's two eldest sons, Thomas Proctor Ryland and Walter Proctor Ryland, were both dogged by ill health and subsequently died at a relatively early age. Consequently the estates at Moxhull Park and Wishaw were given to Howard Proctor Ryland.

Howard was born on the 14<sup>th</sup> July 1851. He was aged 24 when he married Agnes Adeline Howard on the 9<sup>th</sup> February 1876. Agnes was the daughter of Sir Frederick Howard Kt., JP. DL., of Bedford.

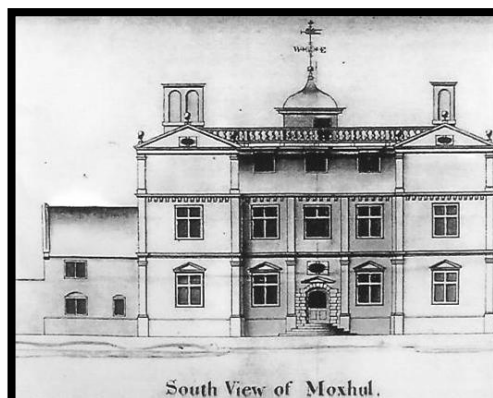
The same year saw the birth of their son, Thomas Howard Ryland, on the 11<sup>th</sup> December and, in due course, they had two daughters, Millicent Mary and Gwyneth. H. Ryland.

Five years later, the 1881 Census Return shows Howard, who was an Agricultural Chemist, and his wife, were living in Doe Bank, Sutton Coldfield. By 1891, however, they had moved and were living at 'The Cedars', Gravelly Hill, Erdington.

Not long after this, Howard and his family moved into Moxhull Hall and he was eventually made Lord Lieutenant of Warwickshire.

## **Moxhull Hall & Wishaw**

The history of the estates dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century and ownership of them brought with it the title 'Lord of the Manors of Moxhull and Wishaw'.



**Moxhull Hall from a drawing by John Snape 1763.**



**Moxhull Hall from a drawing by J.P.Neale Circa 1821.**

Unfortunately, Howard Ryland's stay at the Hall was not a happy one. In similar fashion to his elder brothers, his health began to fail. He somehow formed the opinion that the mansion itself was to blame and that germs and disease had actively infected the fabric of the building, including the brickwork, stonework and timbers.

With the benefit of today's technology, it was obviously a fanciful and impossible theory and it never dawned upon him that, perhaps, his condition (possibly tuberculosis) was hereditary.

In 1903, he decided the answer to his problems would be to build another manor house on a site at the top of a hill, where it would receive the benefit of the fresh air. This was a little distance away to the North West. The design was in the neo-Tudor style and is now known as Moxhull Hall Hotel.



**Moxhull Hotel Hotel. Circa 1980.**

He and his family vacated the old Hall and soon afterwards it was badly damaged as a result of a fire, either by accident or design, nobody knows. Rumour, however, has it that the owner himself was responsible.

The year 1905, saw the death of old Thomas Ryland on the 1<sup>st</sup> March, aged 87. His son, Howard, sadly did not enjoy the benefit of his newly built home for very long, as he also died that year on the 28<sup>th</sup> December, aged 54. The following year, saw the death of his wife Agnes Adeline Ryman, on the 18<sup>th</sup> July. Her memorial and that of her husband can be found in St. Chad's Church, Wishaw.

In his Will, Howard Proctor Ryland left an amount of £175,077 (approximately £10M today).

His son, Thomas Howard Ryland, succeeded him. Thomas married Beryl Stratheden in 1909 and the next year saw the birth of their son Nigel, followed later by a daughter, Pamela.

He had the stables of the old Hall converted into what became Park House. This was sold in 1914, together with 1,052 acres of land. In due course, this became the nucleus of 'The Belfry', which now enjoys a world-wide reputation as a golf and leisure complex. It has hosted the Ryder Cup on no fewer than four occasions.

Thomas Howard Ryland sold Moxhull Hall in 1929 and he and his family moved to Morton House, Leamington Spa. He died in hospital, in nearby Warwick, on the 12th October 1948.

## **Traumatic Times**

It can be seen from the events which transpired between the years 1903 and 1906, that the period in question must have been an extremely traumatic one for Howard Proctor Ryland's daughter, Millicent.

She was only a young woman, being in her mid-twenties and had already experienced a move to a new property, seen the destruction of her previous home and endured the loss of her grandfather, father and mother, all within the space of two years!

Left alone, with just her brother, in a huge manor house, it is quite understandable that she would feel the need to move away and make a fresh start elsewhere.

The following year, in 1907, she was living at 'Chalford', Belwell Lane. It is understood she brought with her many items of furniture from her family home.

The pair of bedsteads, pictured below, is a prime example.



**Pair of bedsteads pictured at 'Chalford', Belwell Lane,  
Four Oaks on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2009.**

The Trustees of E H James must have been quite pleased when Millicent Ryland approached them, as 'Chalford' appears to have been unoccupied since the property was put up for auction in June 1904. Certainly there were no entries in the Burgess Roll for this period.

It is likely Millicent only rented the property from the Trustees, as she lived there for less than two years before moving on. She probably used this period to look around for a suitable permanent residence.

Although 'Chalford' was a good sized property, with a generous amount of land surrounding it to ensure privacy, it would have seemed relatively modest to Millicent Ryland, who was used to living in a manor house with one thousand acres attached. It should also be noted that, during the latter part of 1907, the Trustees managed to successfully negotiate the sale of 'Chalford' to a new owner.

It would seem that life did, subsequently, improve for Millicent, as she met up with a Jarvis Radley Eddison, whom she eventually married in 1912. The ceremony took place in Marylebone, Greater London. Millicent was 31 at the time and her husband just a year older.

His father, Robert Eddison, who lived at the Manor House, Main Street, Beighton, Derbyshire, farmed approximately 225 acres of land in the area and employed 5 men and 2 boys.

At an early age, Jarvis was sent away to boarding school at Clifton, Bristol and, subsequently, he followed in the farming tradition of his father, when he became an agricultural student, staying at 74, Castle Street, Cirencester, Gloucestershire.



## **CHAPTER 3.**

### **HENRY OWEN & FAMILY.**

#### **(Second Owner and Third Occupant)**

Henry Owen was born in Shifnal, Shropshire in 1837, the youngest son of Richard Owen, who was a Farmer and the Parish Clerk.

In 1851 Henry was still attending school and living with his family.

Ten years later, aged 24, he was noted as boarding with Mr. & Mrs. Himley in Bath Row, Birmingham.

Henry subsequently met a girl named Sarah Turnbull and, in due course, they decided to marry. The marriage ceremony took place in Sarah's home town of Whitby, North Yorkshire on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 1862.

Sarah's father was a watchmaker who lived at 'Paddock House', Whitby. At the time, Henry's occupation was described as a commission agent and he was then residing at Cedar Terrace, Villa Street, Aston, Birmingham.



**Map of Whitby, North Yorkshire. Circa 1860.**

Whitby is a small fishing port on the same stretch of coastline as Robin Hood's Bay, of 'Wainwright's Walks' fame, and Scarborough.

For a relatively small town it has a fascinating history. Captain James Cook sailed from Whitby on his renowned voyages of discovery. The vessels he used were Whitby colliers, chosen by Cook for their excellent sailing qualities and their ability to carry large volumes of supplies.

Abraham 'Bram' Stoker based much of his 1897 horror story 'Dracula' on Whitby, during his stay in the town a few years earlier.

Whitby jet is also famous throughout Britain. In the early 1800's the use of jet for jewellery and ornaments began what was to prove to be a dramatic resurgence in popularity, which would last until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Jet is a semi-precious stone which, when polished, takes on an intense waxy lustre of the deepest opaque black, hence the origin of the description '*jet black*'.

The rich black colour never fades and the shine which can be achieved is such that polished jet was even used as mirrors in medieval times.

Jet comprises an unusually pure and hard form of fossilized wood, more specifically an ancient and relatively abundant species of monkey puzzle tree, which occurs as thin lens-shaped seams within a series of shale rocks. These were laid down in the early Jurassic era, some 175-185 million years ago.

The rocks can only be found within the area of land encompassed by the North York Moors National Park. Jet not only occurs beneath much of the Park landscape itself but, more importantly, is also exposed in the cliffs lying to the north west and south east of Whitby, making it far more accessible. Whitby therefore became the centre of the most remarkable period in the history of jet, the Victorian era.



**A Whitby jet worker at his bench.**

Although as many as ten jet workshops were operating in the town by 1815, it was not until the mid-1800's that the jet industry became well and truly established.

Demand increased due to three main factors. Whitby became more easily reachable as a result of the advent of the railway. This subsequently dovetailed with the Victorian's love of seaside holidays and the purchasing of holiday souvenirs. The final, and far more important reason, was the vogue for jet mourning jewellery. Victorian fashion was predominantly class-led, with Queen Victoria herself ultimately setting the example, following the death of her beloved Prince Albert in 1861.

The Whitby jet industry was at its height in 1873, at which time approximately 1,500 men were employed in some 200 manufacturing workshops.

Shortly after Henry and Sarah Owen were married, Sarah may have planted the first seeds of an idea in her husband's mind, with regards to the jewellery industry, as she must have been conversant with the situation in Whitby, having grown up there. In addition, Henry's fledgling early career as an accountant would have enabled him to start a business and handle all the necessary associated book-keeping work necessary.

Whether he did an apprenticeship in Whitby or returned to his adopted home in Birmingham is not apparent but, what is beyond dispute, is the fact that by 1871 he was involved in the trade and described as a manufacturing jeweller.

At this point in time, they were living in Maney, Sutton Coldfield. Their marriage had prospered and they were the parents to five young children, three sons and two daughters. The children's ages varied between 7 years and 3 months.

Also living with them was Sarah's brother Edwin Turnbull, whose occupation was significantly noted as a '*Jet Ornaments Manufacturer*'. Perhaps Edwin was the person who taught Henry the secrets of the trade.

Even at this early stage, Henry's business must have been quite successful, as he was able to employ two domestic servants.

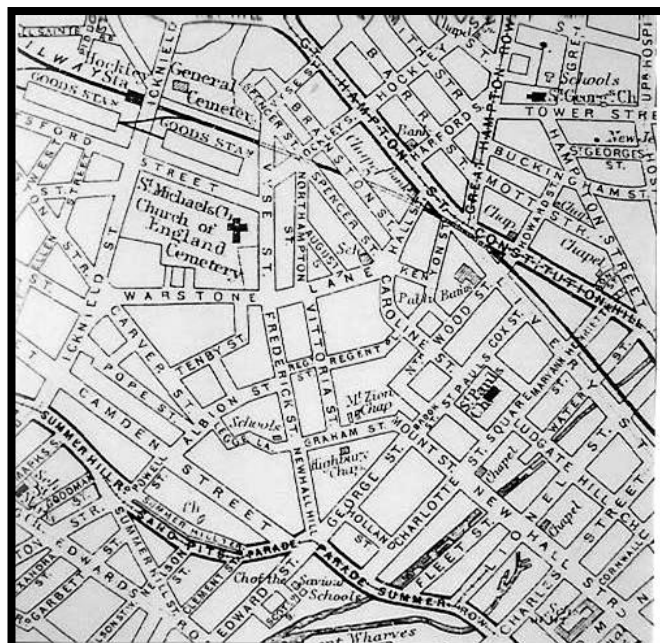
Ten years on, Henry Owen and his family were living at 'Somerfield', Manor Hill, Sutton Coldfield. As befitted his growing stature and wealth, the large property stood in its own grounds of just over three acres, which comprised mature, well-laid out gardens with trees and shrubs. Also included was a separate Kitchen Garden stocked with choice fruit trees, a grassed Tennis Court, a separate Pasture and an established Plantation fronting Manor Road.

Internally, the family residence comprised a Dining Room, Drawing Room, Morning Room, Kitchen, Housemaid's Pantry, Larder, Scullery and a basement area with two excellent Cellars. Front and rear staircases led to the first floor which had 5 Bedrooms, Dressing Room, Bathroom and W.C. On the second floor was a good sized Attic.

In addition, outbuildings comprised a Coach House and Stable with two rooms over, two Potting Sheds and a W.C.

Between them Henry and Sarah now had seven children and employed a Niece, to act as Governess.

Henry's business had expanded and he was now responsible for 4 men, 6 boys and 4 women. The firm's premises were in Vyse Street, Birmingham, in the heart of the Jewellery Quarter, which he had occupied for over twelve years.



**Map of the Jewellery Quarter. Circa 1899. The streets in which Henry Owen conducted his business at various times, are shaded.**

The Jewellery Quarter is one of the last surviving examples of the transition from an essentially domestic to an industrialized economy. Three centuries of industrial innovation, growth and decay may be traced in its streets and buildings.

Working in precious metal in Birmingham dates back to at least the 14th century, but the industry did not attain national importance until the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The wealthy Colmore family was the main instigators of this change. Until the 1740's, building land in Birmingham was supplied in small parcels by separate owners. In 1746, however, Ann Colmore obtained a private Act of Parliament permitting her to divide up her entire New Hall estate to the north of what is now known as Colmore Row and to grant building leases.

The release of this Colmore land was a godsend to the many small manufacturers seeking premises. Most numerous of these were the crafts people involved in Birmingham's small trades making such items as buttons, buckles and jewellery. Plot sizes varied enormously, although the majority of houses sold were for well under £100 and were unlikely to have consisted of more than two or three rooms. Many such properties were residences, with workshops attached and located in the yards of the larger houses.

By 1780 the town end of the Colmore estate presented a complex picture of mixed development. Wealthy manufacturers and increasing numbers of prosperous merchants lived 'cheek-by-jowl' with the mean hovels of unskilled labourers.

Terraces occupied by skilled artisans backed onto workshops or small tenements or onto the garden of a property that had resisted encroachments.

By the end of the century, in-filling of vacant lots, coupled with intensive sub-letting, had led to a densely packed district, which was cut through by narrow passages and alleyways, a significant sign of the way the Jewellery Quarter would develop 50 years later.

A survey undertaken in 1948 revealed that the central core boasted the highest density of industrial land usage in Great Britain.

By the 1840's jewellery manufacture was an important but by no means dominant Birmingham staple trade. However, with the flood of cheap gold from California and Australia after 1849, the industry was able to expand dramatically. This, in turn, permitted specialisation in the production process. In 1830 it was possible to identify some 8 or 9 individual traders. At the turn of the century, this number had risen to over 30. Each trade determined its particular working environment. The ring maker, for example, required little more than a bench, whereas a silversmith would demand a small workshop.

Jewellery manufacture made few demands on space and could be accommodated in a small room of a dwelling house, whereas the mechanised trades such as pressing, electroplating etc. often needed purpose-built premises, ranging from a small workshop to a full-scale factory.

The 'Jewellery' magazine reproduced a letter dated 1993 from Gwen Sly, whose father was a self-employed engraver in the 1940's. In it she recalled what The Jewellery Quarter was like in her day.

***"The house in which my father rented a room was in Augusta Street and had been built around 1830. It must have been a prosperous dwelling in its day where the jeweller lived two up and two down with 'shopping' at the back where he plied his trade.***

***When my father moved in there was a watchmaker in one room, a diamond setter in another, a polisher in a third and a stamper in the 'shopping'. To this little hive of industry which was repeated all over the 'Quarter', porters from the various factors used to fetch and carry all the work to be done or completed. These porters, who appeared to me to be about 100 years old but were probably in their 60's, bent with rheumatism, would shuffle round the streets pushing a basket carriage containing parcels of silver and gold goods. No one expected they might be mugged – even the slightest push would have knocked them over! At the end of the day they would wend their way to the Post Office and despatch their valuable cargo to customers not only in this country but all over the world.***

***I wonder if the wearers of this jewellery ever realised how many craftsmen, each working in his five-bob-a-week room, had been involved in producing a work of art from the raw material within that fascinating area".***

It can be seen from this that Henry Owen would have been able to set up his business with a very modest initial cost and build up from there.

By 1866 some 7,000 workmen and women were employed within the gold, silver and allied trades in Birmingham. This rose to nearly 30,000 by 1914, the various trades remaining concentrated in what, by then, was a very overcrowded Quarter.

Henry Owen moved his family away from Sutton Coldfield to Edgbaston and in 1891 they could be found living in Highfield Road, which is situated close to the Hagley Road and 'Five Ways'. This neighbourhood probably suited Henry better, as the Jewellery Quarter could be reached quite quickly and easily.

At the time of the Census Return, Henry and Sarah had all their children, now numbering eight, still living with them.

The following year, Henry found it necessary to move his business premises from Vyse Street to nearby Augusta Street, possibly due to the need for added space.

Kelly's Directory for that year described Henry Owen as a *Manufacturer and patentee of the 'Deversum' solitaire & collar stud also Owen's patent studs and the 'Benefactum' patent link.*

The next Census Return for 1901, shows Henry and Sarah staying at the home of Sarah's brother in Bagdale, one of the well known streets in the centre of Whitby. It is likely that they were just visiting, or on holiday at the time, as there is no evidence they moved there permanently and no other family members were mentioned as accompanying them.

Although the residence they had in Edgbaston was more convenient, perhaps the family preferred the more rural aspect on the other side of the City, because by 1893 they were known to be living at 'Springfield', Wylde Green and they remained in this property for the next 15 years.

'Springfield' was delightfully situated looking over towards the lake at Penns Hall from an elevated position, which is, no doubt, why it became a desirable acquisition as a club house by Walmley Golf Club, when it expanded its course to eighteen holes in May 1908. The Club itself was formed on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1902 and a nine hole course was originally opened on the 20<sup>th</sup> December of the same year.

In 1909, Henry Owen finally agreed to lease 'Springfield', described as a substantial Victorian dwelling in Beardmore Road, to Walmley Golf Club. This was subsequently used as their club house until a new, modern structure was built in 1965.



**View of 'Springfield' from the fairway. Circa 1950's.**

Prior to this transaction being agreed upon, Henry Owen, in 1907, had opened up negotiations with the Trustees of E. H. James, in respect of the purchase of 'Chalford', Belwell Lane, Four Oaks.

Agreement was eventually reached and a conveyance was executed on the 31<sup>st</sup> October of that same year for 'a house 'Chalford', plus land in whole 2 acres, 10 poles'.



**Rear elevation of 'Springfield', when it was used as a club house  
by Walmley Golf Club.**

On the 27<sup>th</sup> August 1909 he also purchased additional land totaling 1 acre, 2 rods fronting onto Belwell Lane from the Trustees. Shortly after this, between the period 1909 – 1910, Henry and his family took occupation.

Henry and his wife continued to live at 'Chalford' for a number of years until 1917 when Henry was taken into 'Bushwood', a nursing home in St. James' Road, Edgbaston, where he died on the 18<sup>th</sup> September of that year.

Probate was granted to his widow Sarah on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1918. He left £22,378. 8s. 10d, which is equivalent to approximately £600,000 by present day standards.

Sarah Owen remained at 'Chalford' until sometime the following year. She then moved, aged 77, to what is thought to be a smaller property.

In the meantime, Henry Owen's firm continued to prosper. Two of his sons, Arthur and Charles Henry, followed their father into the business and, in Kelly's Directory of 1940, there was an entry for Henry Owen & Sons Ltd. They had also moved by this time to 72, Caroline Street and were described as Stud Makers T/as 'Deversum'.

## **CHAPTER 4.**

### **ALFRED ROBERTS & FAMILY.**

#### **(Third Owner & Fourth Occupant)**

Unfortunately, nothing much is known about Alfred Roberts the Third Owner of 'Chalford'.

His name appears on the Sutton Coldfield Register of Electors as being in occupation of the property during the period 1920-1925.

We know he was married to Sarah Annie Roberts and they had at least one son as, in 1921, Alfred Sydney Roberts was also included on the Register.

It is interesting to note that when 'Chalford' was first built back in the middle of the 1880's, there were almost no other properties in the near vicinity, as can be ascertained by the 1888 Ordnance Survey Map.

By 1903, however, the area was beginning to change. Although there were still no other dwellings on the same side of the road as 'Chalford', quite a few houses had sprung up on the opposite side. In addition, building had commenced along Clarence Road.

The Ordnance Map of 1914 shows continuing development in Belwell Lane, in the direction of Four Oaks and also towards the junction with Lichfield Road, Mere Green.

The population was increasing in direct relation to the houses being erected and Belwell Lane was slowly losing its quiet rural feel.

Another point of interest is the existence at this time of a 'Bell Well' situated about 25 yards from the driveway entrance to 'Chalford'. The survey maps of 1888 & 1903 clearly show the position of this, where it has been designated as a *Spring*.

The name Belwell Lane seems to have been derived from the well. It was set in the wall fronting the grounds of 'Chalford' not far from the junction with Clarence Road.

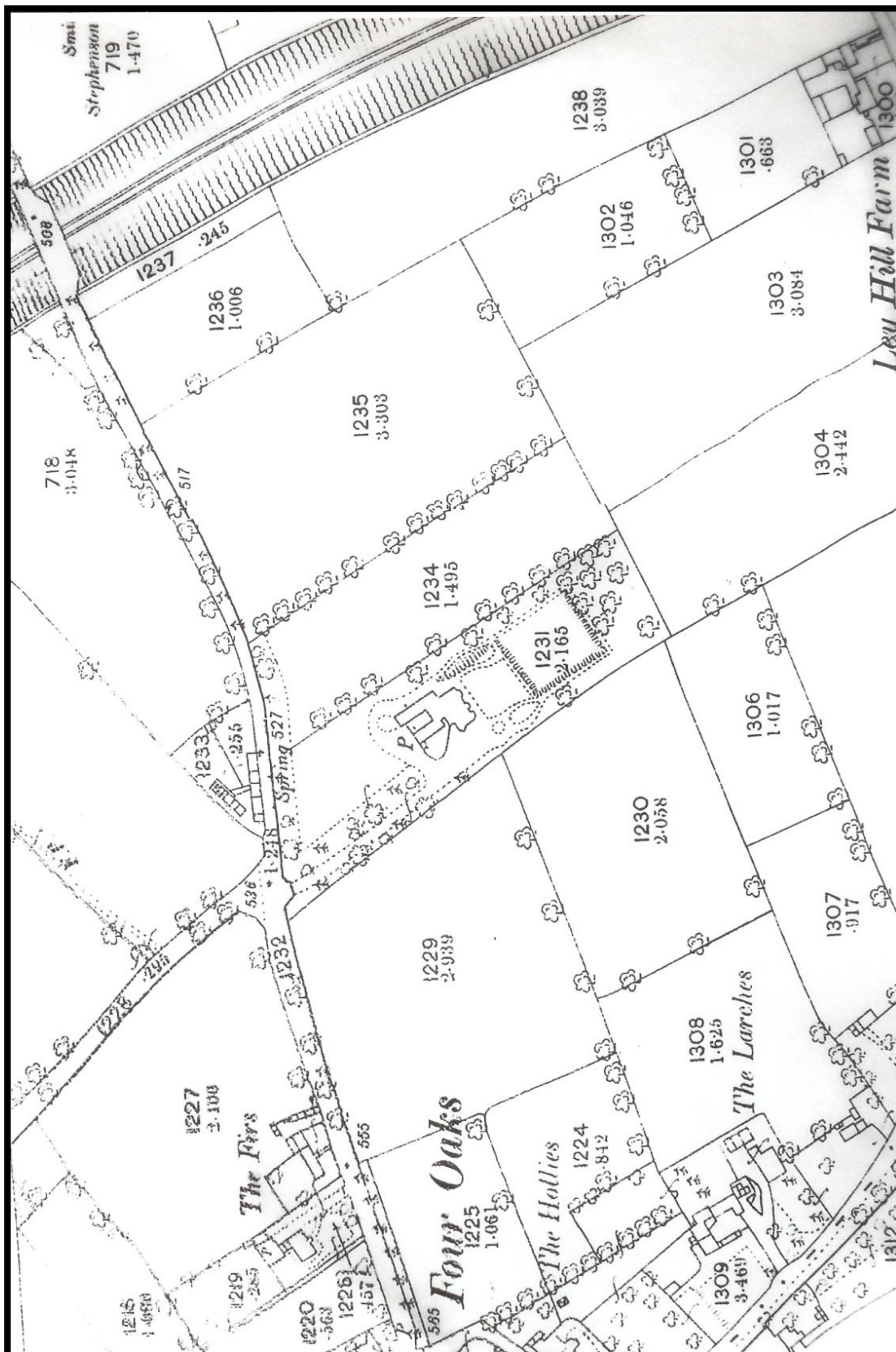
Repairs over the years resulted in the level of the road gradually being raised, until only the arch stone could be seen. Around the period 1955-56 further road surfacing finally obscured the arch completely.

The photograph below was taken about 1924, during the time the Roberts family occupied 'Chalford'.

The well was not used for drinking purposes after about 1850.

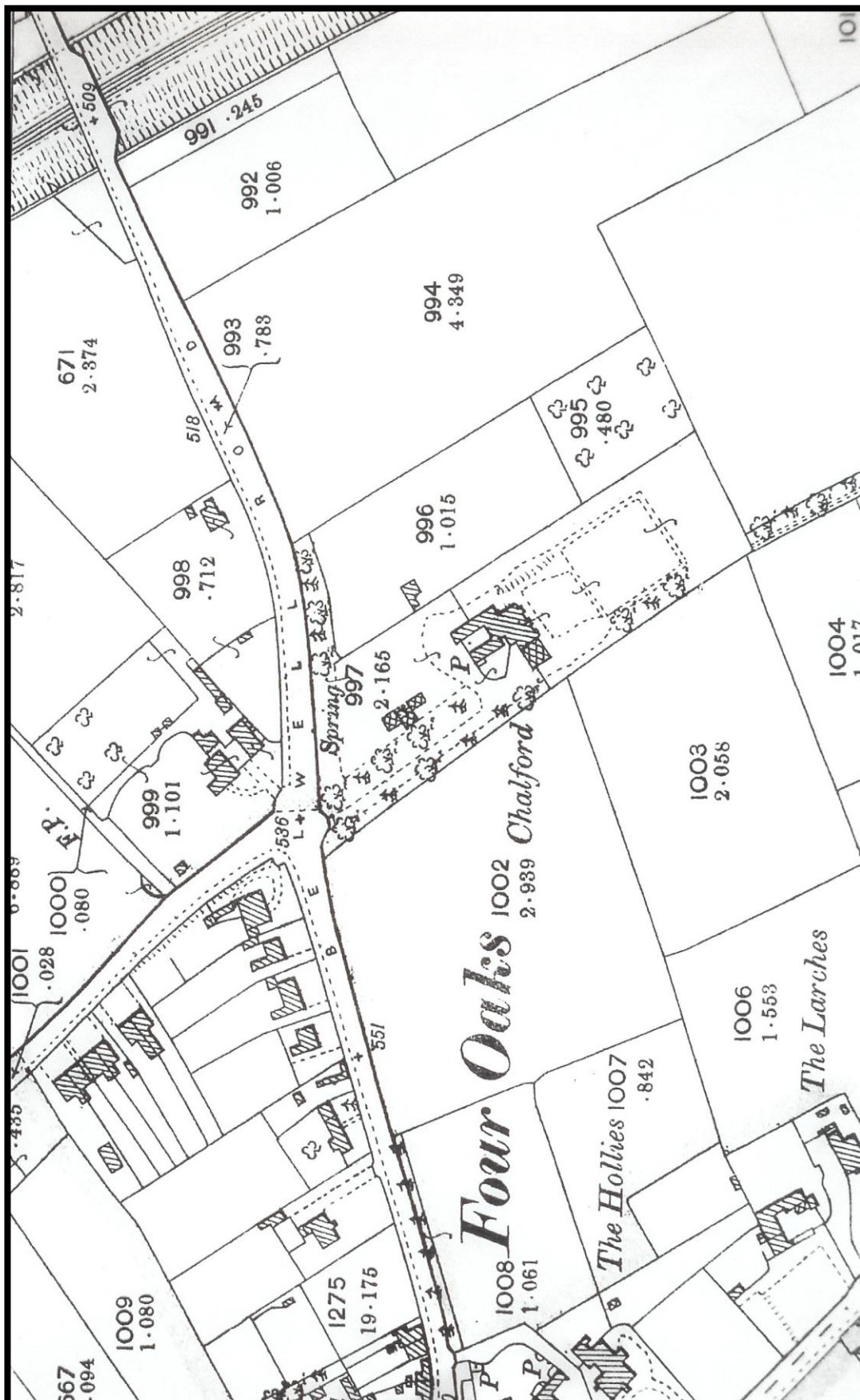




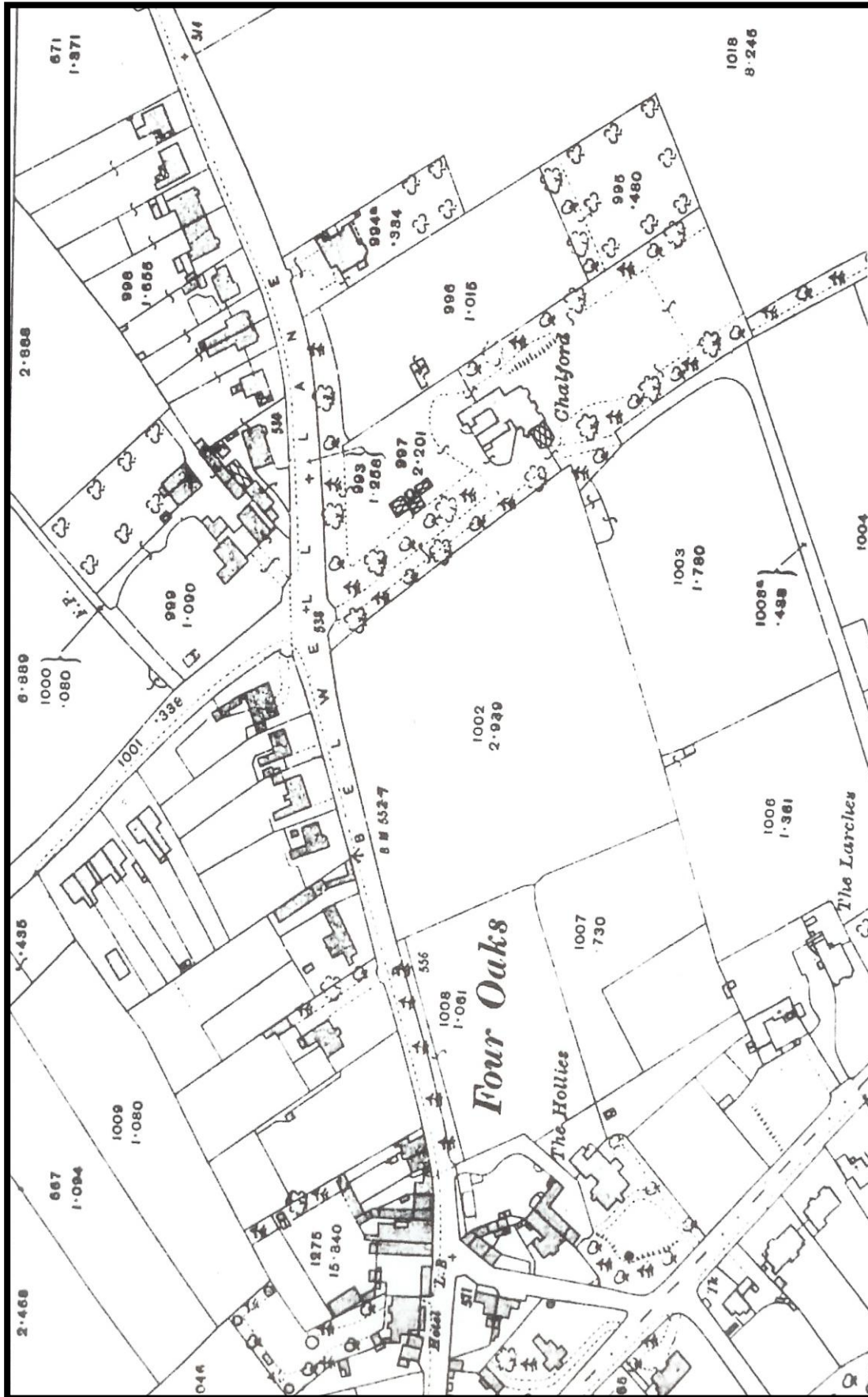


Ordnance Survey Map 1888.





**Ordnance Survey Map 1903.**



Ordnance Survey Map. 1914.

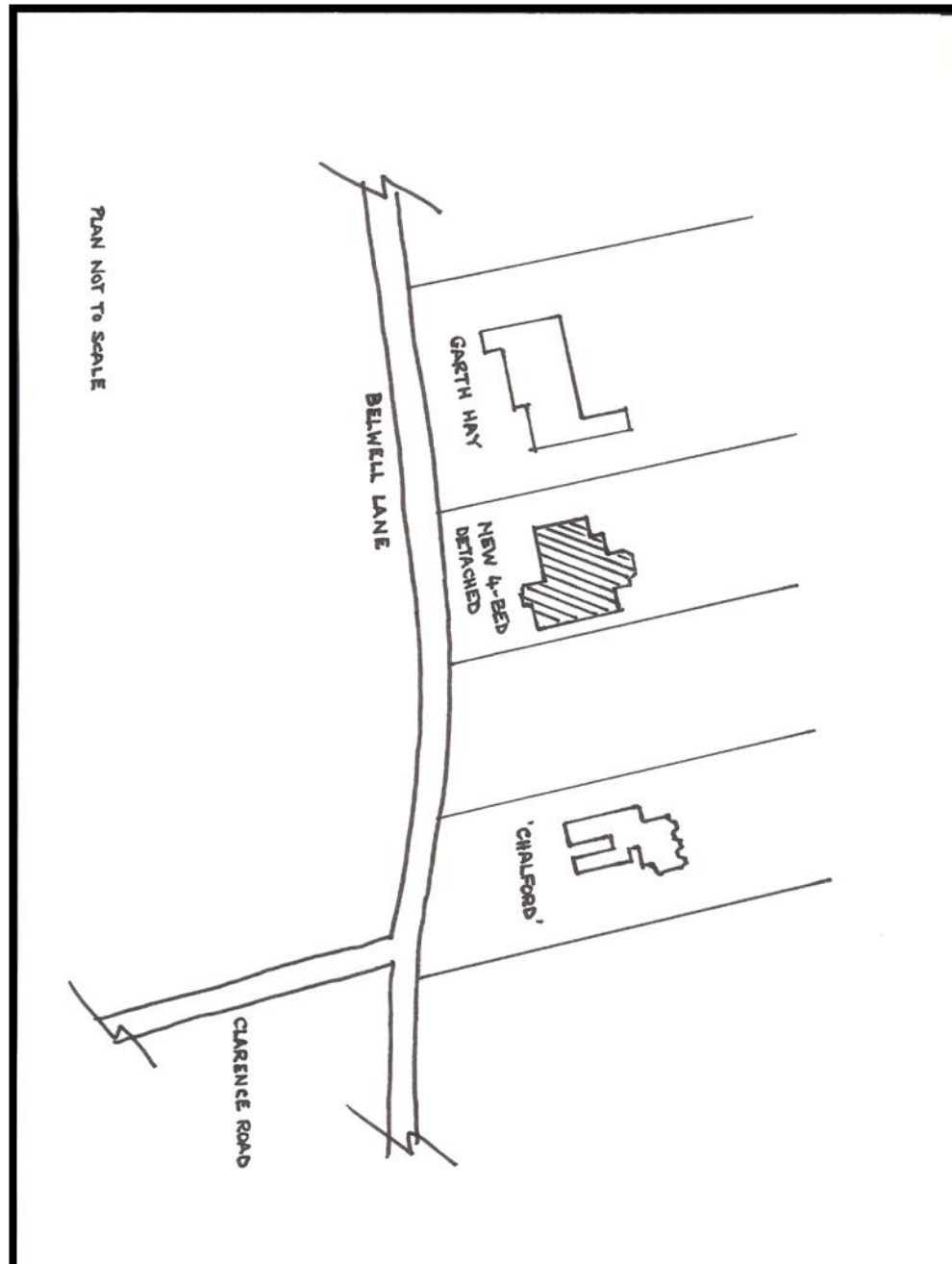
A little over 12 months after the family left 'Chalford', an application was made, on the 6<sup>th</sup> January 1927, for the erection of a 4-bedroomed detached house on a plot of land nearby, by a Mr A S Roberts.

Although it cannot be ascertained that this was the same Roberts, who had previously owned 'Chalford', it is a remarkable coincidence.

It is highly possible that, having lived in the area for a number of years, he decided he wished to continue to reside nearby.

It is also possible that he wished to have a slightly smaller and more modern property than 'Chalford'.

The house was designed by Ernest G Harrison of County Chambers, Corporation Street, Birmingham.



**Plan of New 4-Bedroomed Detached Residence for Mr A S Roberts 1927.**

## **CHAPTER 5.**

### **ALFRED EDWARD ROBIE FARMER CHEATLE & FAMILY.**

#### **(Fourth Owner & Fifth Occupant)**

Alfred Cheatle was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1871 at Dosthill, Kingsbury, Warwickshire, to Thomas Farmer Cheatle, a gentleman farmer and his wife Mary.

This very interesting surname is of pre 8<sup>th</sup> century Scandinavian origin. It is a later foreshortening of the personal compound name 'Thur-kettle', itself a derivative of the old Norse personal name Arnkell, composed of the elements 'arn' meaning 'eagle' and 'ketil' translating as a 'helmet' or 'helmeted warrior'. The surname was originally recorded mainly on the east coast of England, where Scandinavian influence was strongest. In the modern idiom there are at least four spelling variations including Cheatle, Chatell, Chattell and Cattle.

Alfred Cheatle's father, who had also been born in Kingsbury, farmed 312 acres and employed 5 agricultural labourers and 3 boys. The 1871 Census indicated the family, in addition, employed four servants.

Ten years later, Thomas Cheatle had expanded his land holdings to 370 acres and was employing 9 labourers, 4 boys and 1 woman. His family had also increased and now included:-

*Ernest S Cheatle aged 6 years.*

*Mary G Cheatle aged 4 years.*

*Alice M M Cheatle aged 6 months.*

A private Governess was employed to look after the young children. However, at this point in time, Alfred Cheatle, who would have then been aged 10, had already been sent away to boarding school, to further his education.

The school chosen for Alfred by his parents was Christ's Hospital School, Hertford and the 1881 Census Return includes his name as a pupil.

For some 400 years Hertford was the home of Christ's Hospital and the Bluecoat girls and boys that inhabited it. The name is misleading, however, as the institution was not only a hospital but a school, established under Royal Charter. It was formed in 1552 by King Edward VI to care for the homeless or unfortunate children in London. It was a preparatory school for reading, writing and arithmetic. It was designed to accommodate up to 400 boys and 100 girls and had an infirmary for 100 sick children. The entrance to the school featured the figures of two *Bluecoat* boys which were donated by Sir John Dimsdale in 1721. Between 1902 and 1906 the boys were moved to the school's present premises in Horsham, Sussex.



**Entrance to Christ's Hospital School 1830.**

The grounding he received at Christ's Hospital School obviously served him well, as he eventually qualified as an Architect.

In 1892, aged 21, he joined the architectural practice of Thomas Walter Francis Newton (1862-1903), which was situated at 121 Colmore Row, Birmingham and the partnership of Newton & Cheatle was formed.

Kelly's Directory for 1899 lists the practice as being at 39 Newhall Street. These premises, together with the firm's records, were sadly completely destroyed during the War.



**View of No.43, Newhall Street, Birmingham in Victorian Times.  
Newton & Cheatle's Offices were at No.39 until at least the 1930's.**

The final recorded address for the firm in 1941 was 67A New Street.

The partnership's most important work was concentrated into a short but very intensive period from around 1897 to 1903. It was at this point in time that Thomas Newton died suddenly at the early age of forty.

After Newton's death, the work of the firm continued, though less intensively. In 1927, Charles Stansbury Madeley joined as a partner.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1901, Alfred Cheatle married Rhoda Beatrice Barker at Kingsbury Parish Church.

His wife was the sister of Herbert and Frank Barker of Barker Brothers, later Barker, Ellis & Co., who were a major firm of Birmingham silversmiths. This association with the Barker family proved to be extremely beneficial to the firm of Newton & Cheatle, as they subsequently designed their factory on Constitution Hill, Birmingham.



**The former Barker Bros. factory, Constitution Hill, Birmingham.**



They also submitted plans for Barker and Beconsfield Roads, Four Oaks on behalf of the Trustees of William Barker and worked on private houses for individual members of the Barker family, No 26 Barker Road being a fine example, which was designed in 1900 for Edwin Moore Esq.

The firm itself was first established in 1801 by Mary Barker. The business was continued by her son William Barker, in partnership with a man named Creed under the title of Barker & Creed.

In 1885 the firm traded under the name of Barker Brothers at Unity Works, Paradise Street, Birmingham. The partnership consisted of Herbert Edward Barker and Mathias Barker.

In 1903 they moved to the new factory premises in Constitution Hill and, in 1907, the firm converted to a limited liability company under the title of Barker Brothers (Silversmiths) Limited. They also had premises at High Holborn, London.

Today, individual pieces of silver manufactured by the firm can still be found for sale in auction rooms across the country and also on the internet, where they command high prices.



**26 Barker Road, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield.**

Newton & Cheadle became well known for designing '*Arts and Crafts*' houses in the suburbs of Moseley, Northfield, Barnt Green, Walsall and Four Oaks.

In 1897 the firm succeeded in interesting local businessmen in a major project to develop arcades in Birmingham City Centre. These were built between 1898 and 1901 and originally ran from Union Street through to New Street and High Street. They were not the first or last arcades to be built in Birmingham, but were the most popular and successful. The arcades were largely destroyed in the 1941 air raids, but their original line can still be traced today, through the modern walkways replacing them.

They were also responsible for major developments on John Bright Street and Station Street for Frank Taylor & Chambers Ltd.

In Moseley, Newton & Cheadle designed 'The Fighting Cocks' Public House on behalf of the Holt Brewery Company.



**'The Fighting Cocks', Moseley, Birmingham.**

The distinctive corner tower dominates the High Street and is, perhaps, the most recognisable landmark in Moseley today. The building includes typical Newton & Cheadle detail, such as the shallow jutting bays to the upper floor function rooms, the corner porch and the decorative leded lights, though these are more Art Deco in character than most of their buildings.

The firm also designed several interesting buildings around the area of Newhall Street, Church Street, Edmund Street and Cornwall Street, now the recognised legal and business quarter of the City Centre. Some of these premises appear to be overwhelmed by subsequent modern developments like the charming '*Arts and Crafts*' business chambers situate 41-43 Church Street.



**Business Chambers, 41-43 Church Street, Birmingham.**

Other designs for their facades were either neo-Georgian, or neo-Jacobean. Some of the details, including railings, gates and lead panelling were considered to be extremely attractive features

In addition to 41-43 Church Street, the following buildings can still be seen in and around the Birmingham City Centre:-

City Arcade, 93 & 95 Cornwall Street and 56-60 Newhall Street. All have been granted Grade II\* listed status.

Turning back to the domestic front, Alfred Cheatle and his wife Rhoda lived for many years at Four Oaks House, 28 Walsall Road, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield and they had two children namely:-

*Godfrey Barker Cheatle*  
*Kathleen Thelma Cheatle*

*born 12/07/1903*  
*born 16/04/1904*

*died January 1989 aged 85.*  
*died October 1985 aged 81.*

In 1920 they moved to 'The Oaklands', Penns Lane, Walmley, before moving to 'Chalford', 65 Belwell Lane, Four Oaks, Sutton Coldfield in 1926.

The Cheatle family lived at 'Chalford' for the next 20 years and, although there is no documentary evidence to support the claim, it is highly likely that it was Alfred Cheatle who dramatically changed the appearance of the original solid Victorian structure to an altogether lighter looking *Arts and Crafts* design. He was, after all, by profession, an Architect and as previously indicated he was an advocate of this style.

The major alterations were to the south facing external elevation. The heavy looking windows to the Third Floor, each having a triangular gable apex and the central balcony were swept away and replaced by three smaller dormer windows, set in a simplified roof line.

The bay windows to the Second Floor, two of which had their own sloping slate roofs, were also removed and, in their place, three, eight sectioned, leaded light windows with tile hanging sections below, were substituted.

On the Ground Floor, three small windows to the Drawing Room, Breakfast Room and Dining Room respectively were replaced by bay windows to match the First Floor. In addition, two alcoves were dispensed with.

The large glass Conservatory attached to the left hand side of the property was demolished and replaced by a small timber and leaded light Vestabule, situated between the Drawing Room and Breakfast Room.



**South Elevation of 'Chalford' in 2009**



Many other alterations were also made to the interior of 'Chalford' and the following photographs highlight a selection of these modifications:-



**Detail of wrought iron window furniture and leaded window. It is also interesting to note a later addition, which is an early form of window security lock!**



**Detail of feature fireplace in Dining Room, with dummy window.**



**Detail of folding glazed doors, leading from the Breakfast Room into the Hall.**



**Detail of a Bedroom fireplace (Type I.)**



**Detail of a Bedroom fireplace (Type II).**

Alfred Cheatle died at Woodleigh Nursing Home, Wylde Green, Sutton Coldfield, on the 29<sup>th</sup> November 1941, just short of his 71<sup>st</sup> birthday.

Probate was granted on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1942 to his widow, his son Godfrey Barker Cheatle, a Company Director and his daughter Kathleen Thelma Cheatle, who was still a spinster.

He left a gross figure of £16,329. 9s. 10d. (net value being £12,874. 5s. 2d.)

He bequeathed all his personal chattels to his wife Rhoda Beatrice Cheatle and the bulk of his clothing to his gardener Arthur J Moore.

His holdings in Barker Brothers (Silversmiths) Limited and the Midland Spring Company were bequeathed to his son and his daughter benefited from his holdings in W Canning & Company.

His partner, Charles Stanbury Madeley, was also mentioned in connection with the architectural practice.

His Solicitors were Bickley & Lynex of 63 Temple Row, Birmingham.

His wife and daughter continued to live at 'Chalford' until the property was sold in 1946. During this time it is interesting to note that, for a period, the family agreed to billet six American G. I.'s in their home.

Tom Morrissey was one of the soldiers concerned and it would appear that they got far more than they were expecting. He stated that:-

*“They were billeted into the servant’s quarters of a large house in Four Oaks. The property was set in a large estate with well maintained grounds. Although the family was not allowed servants because of the war, they did have an elderly gent who attended to the gardens. (This was probably Arthur Moore - see Last Will and Testament of Alfred Cheatle).*

*The men’s rooms were small but comfortable, they had their own bathroom and a separate stairway to the main entrance. They were invited to use a spacious drawing room in the house, which was well furnished. It had a big hearth and glass panel doors. At nine o’clock each evening Thelma Cheatle, the daughter of the house, would serve tea, as they listened to Ambrose and his Orchestra, on the record player”.*

This style of living was a big contrast to that which the soldiers were used to and probably none of them lived in such opulence again. Tom found it a respite from army regimentation, although the men were still bound by strict rules and had to report at the mess hall on time in the morning or face punishment. When Tom’s parents heard about the ‘gracious outpouring of hospitality’ shown to their son they sent packages of tea, sugar cubes and a mixed variety of goodies for his hosts.

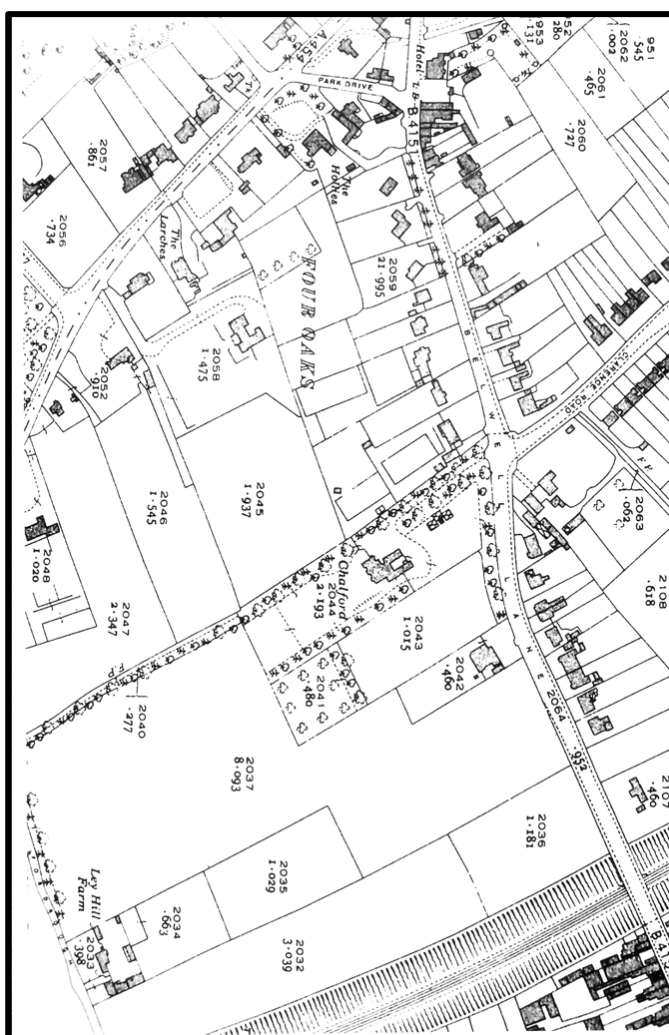
## **CHAPTER 6**

### **HERBERT SMITH & FAMILY.**

#### **Fifth Owner & Sixth Occupant**

The fifth and last owner of 'Chalford' was Herbert Smith, who purchased the property, via public auction, on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1946.

Most unusually, he purchased the property 'sight unseen'. The most important and deciding factor for him was the area of land to the east of the house, which he knew would prove to be ideal as a paddock for his horses.



**Ordnance Survey Map – 1947 Edition. The shaded area shows the land used as a paddock for Herbert Smith's horses.**

Despite completing the sale, he continued to live for a number of years at the family home, situated at 120 Wednesbury Road, Walsall.

'Chalford' was initially occupied by Stanley and Edna Simpson, who were friends of Miss Thelma Cheatle, the daughter of the previous owner.

The Simpson's acted as caretakers on behalf of Herbert Smith and were allowed to stay in the property until 1950, when they decided to move into a house of their own.

Minnie Hudson and her son Clifford then took occupation as housekeeper and caretaker respectively for Mr. Smith. They had previously been caretakers of Mr Smith's business premises in Walsall.

The owner finally moved into 'Chalford' in 1953 and continued to live there with the Hudsons until his marriage.

Herbert Smith, known as '*Bert*', was born on the 13<sup>th</sup> August 1918 in Walsall. The Smith family had been involved in the leather trade in Walsall for hundreds of years. His father, also Herbert Smith, was no exception and eventually he became the Managing Director of Edwin Smith & Sons, Master Curriers, of Stafford Street.

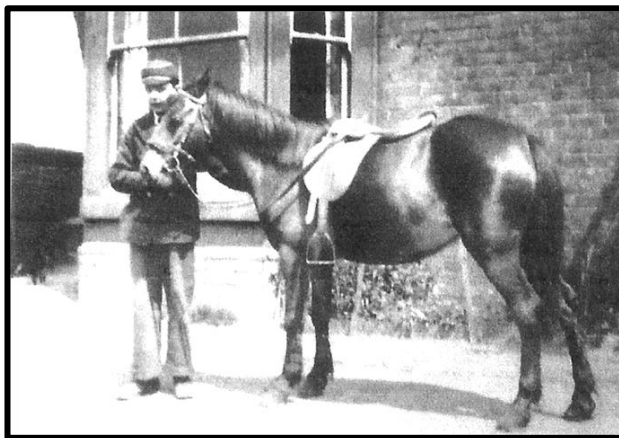
Bert Smith was the nephew of Sir Edwin Smith, who became a Freeman of Walsall. He emigrated to South Australia in his younger days and was for some time a member of their House of Assembly and Legislative Council. He also held the offices of Minister of Education and Lord Mayor of Adelaide.'

In 1931, when Bert was aged about 13, a Governess Cart and harness was bought for him.

However, Bert Smith's father died when he was very young and the harness was provided by a Mr William Beebee, a saddle manufacturer, who occupied the premises adjacent to the Smith family home in Walsall. He was a great support to Bert and his family.

When William Beebee died, the Smith family purchased a huge oak bookcase from his estate, which eventually found its way into the Breakfast Room at 'Chalford'.

The pony that pulled the governess cart was named '*Dolly*', and she was purchased from a 'rag-and-bone man' for £4. 10s after Bert formed a special attachment to her. At the time, the pony was five years old.



**A young Herbert Smith with his treasured pony '*Dolly*'.**

After leaving school Bert trained to be a surveyor and he later joined the old established firm of Fox & Harrison. The firm was founded in 1880 by Matthew Fox and his nephew Matthew Fox Harrison. They were based in Upper Rushall Street and then moved to Upper Bridge Street, before settling into their present premises at 51, Lower Hall Lane, Walsall, in 1895.

The business records of Herbert Smith, whilst he was a surveyor at Fox & Harrison, can be found at Walsall Local History Centre, Essex Street, where the collection is deposited. The collection is largely based upon Lord Hatherton's estate in the Walsall area.

Bert met his wife to be at Fox & Harrison. Marilyn Fellows also worked at the firm and she became his secretary. They eventually decided to marry and the ceremony took place on the 20<sup>th</sup> June 1957 at St. Matthews Parish Church, Walsall. Bert Smith was 38 at the time and his bride was aged 24.

For their honeymoon, they went on a world tour, calling at Zurich, Istanbul, Calcutta, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti, Honolulu and Bermuda.

Bert Smith became very much respected for his long and dedicated service to the community of Walsall. In July 1949, at the age of 31, he was appointed as the Conservative member for the Bridge Ward of Walsall and became the youngest member of the council. He was also closely connected with the Walsall Guild of Social Service and the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Walsall Air Training Corps, the Walsall Mayor's After-War Fund and other charities.

He also represented the Paddock Ward on both the County Borough and the Metropolitan Borough Councils and once stood for the parliamentary elections for Walsall South, but lost out to Bruce George.

He served as secretary to the Walsall Permanent Building Society, as well as being the leader of the anti-socialist group on the council since 1953. He was chairman of the Parliamentary Committee and the Property Committee of the Council and was chairman of the Walsall South Conservative Association.

After he joined the Young Conservatives Association at the end of the Second World War, Councillor Smith held almost every office in the association. He served on the executive and all the sub-committees of the old Walsall Conservative Association, being vice-chairman from 1953 to 1955. Upon the division of Walsall into two constituencies in 1955, he was elected chairman of the new Walsall South Conservative Association.

He was appointed a magistrate in 1955 and was a member of the Juvenile Court Panel and Probation Committee.

During his first 12 years service on the council, he missed only two council meetings. When asked about the discrepancy, he jokingly replied "There is a very good reason for this, - I was on my honeymoon!"

His services to the community were first recognised in 1962, when he was awarded an O.B.E.

He received his O.B.E. from Her Majesty the Queen at Buckingham Palace on the 20<sup>th</sup> March 1962.

As she presented him with the award she told him that she was looking forward very much to her visit to Walsall on Commonwealth Day on the 24<sup>th</sup> May.

Councillor Smith attended the ceremony along with his wife, Marilyn and his Agent, Mr. J Salt.

Afterwards, they all attended a luncheon in the Members' Restaurant at the Houses of Parliament, as guests of Sir Harry Goldsmid (Member of Parliament for the Walsall South Constituency).

Another deserved recognition for his long and dedicated service to the community followed in 1964 when he was elected as the Lord Mayor of Walsall.



**Herbert 'Bert' Smith - March 1964.**

Councillor Herbert Smith donned his robes on May 25<sup>th</sup> 1964. He was one of the youngest men to become Mayor and was the driving force among Conservative workers for many years.

As luck would have it, the timing of his appointment was not ideal for Bert, as it coincided with a General Election.

He pledged, however, to cut himself off from politics for the duration of his twelve months in Office.

He said:-

***"I have given it a great deal of thought and am under no delusion that it is not going to be both painful and agonising to be a prisoner in the Mayor's Parlour while the General Election battle wages outside.***

***The traditional neutrality of the Mayor, however, must transcend all personal feelings and I shall do my utmost to remain completely impartial."***

Under normal circumstances, Councillor Smith would have been supporting the candidature of Sir Harry Goldsmid in the Walsall South Constituency, who had twice held the seat against Socialist opposition.



**The Mayoral Group after the Robing Ceremony at Walsall Council House.**



**Herbert Smith arriving for the Civic Sunday Service at St. Matthews Church.**

Finally, in 1998, he was made a Freeman of the borough, an honour that is rarely bestowed.

He was still an active councillor until well into his eighties.

When Bert and his bride returned from their honeymoon in 1957, they immediately took up residence at 'Chalford'.

Bert also brought 'Dolly' with him. His wife Marilyn, however, was not at all put out or jealous, as this was Bert's favourite pony! In fact the date of her arrival at the house was scratched into the brickwork. 'Dolly' remained a much treasured member of the family until her death in 1957. As a memorial, her name appeared every spring spelled out in snowdrops on her grave!

In addition to 'Dolly', Bert also owned a piebald gelding named 'Major'. His daughter Lindsay also shared her father's love of horses and, during the 1970's, she owned three Welsh ponies, which were stabled at 'Chalford'.

When he could spare the time during his extremely busy business schedule, Bert Smith exercised his two horses in nearby Sutton Park. He looked after their welfare himself, although occasionally when he expected to be late home, he asked his gardener, Mr Musgrove, to bring them in from the paddock for the night.

'Chalford' was extremely well equipt as far as horses were concerned, due to the fact it had a Coach House, Harness Room, Stalls for two horses & a Stable Yard.



**Photograph showing the stable block to the left of the main house in 2008.**

Another interesting feature of the property was the fact that the kitchen garden, greenhouses and potting shed were situated to the left of the main driveway as one entered, not to the rear of the house as was usually the case.

This driveway leading from Belwell Lane up to the main house was initially planted with alternate lime and horse chestnut trees. There were also many elm trees, but these sadly were all lost to the Dutch Elm disease which swept through the United Kingdom during the 1970's & 1980's.

'Chalford' also had its own well, which was situated on the east side of the property. Water was pumped up by the gardener each morning into a large holding tank positioned above the Scullery in the servants quarters. This was then used by the family and domestic staff throughout the day.

Despite the property having substantial grounds, Bert Smith purchased two additional small parcels of land in the late 1950's from the builders Ashworth & Stewart, to ensure his privacy. This proved to be a sensible decision as, over a period of 50 years since acquiring the site, it gradually became completely surrounded by new housing developments.





**Ordnance Survey Map. - 1994 Edition.**

The Register of Electors during the 1961/62 period mentioned Ethel A Weaving and Lily M Bristow as living at 'Chalford' with Mr. & Mrs. Smith. It was later discovered that they were members of staff. Ethel initially went as a companion for Mrs. Hudson in her later years and Lily joined later. It would appear that they were 'Dickensian' characters and many amusing anecdotes date from their occupancy! It is understood, at the time of the sale of the property, there was a bedroom (much altered now) which stubbornly continued to be referred by the family as 'Ethel's Room'!

Two other ladies joined the family in 1962, at the time of the birth of Bert & Marilyn's daughter – Lindsay. These were Mrs. Smith's aunts, Selina and Jane Fellows. Their own sister died at a very young age and Marilyn Fellows lived with them from late adolescence until her marriage to Bert Smith. Selina Fellows used to have a shop in Hospital Street, Walsall. Jane Fellows was a very highly regarded leather sampler, also in Walsall. Selina died in 1985 (aged 85) and Jane followed a little later in 1991 (aged 89). Lindsay Brown described them as extraordinary and much loved characters.

Bert & Marilyn Smith had two children. Eleanor Lindsay Smith was born in 1962 and Julian Fraser Smith followed eight years later in 1970.

Eleanor grew up at 'Chalford' and eventually qualified as a teacher and went on to teach at Arthur Terry Comprehensive School, situated in nearby Clarence Road, where she had originally attended as a pupil.

Lindsay married Michael A Brown in July 1997, when she was aged 35. Michael was also in the teaching profession, being a primary school teacher.

Bert was a bit of an anomaly because, as a surveyor and his almost celebrity status as a councillor in the latter years of his service with Walsall Council, he naturally came under the public's scrutiny on an almost daily basis. He was, nevertheless, an intensely private man once he was away from the spotlight and he led a relatively reclusive private life at home with his family

Bert Smith liked the simple life and he considered 'Chalford' to be his refuge against the outside world. He also saw no reason to change things. The house had restricted electricity and for heating the family used the many open fires available throughout the property.

Bert believed in 'healthy' living, so a stuffy centrally heated home was not on his agenda! Modern gas fired central heating was not, in fact, installed until around 1988. Bert's wife Marilyn joked that,

***"We were encouraged to move around energetically and dress warmly!"***

As mentioned in the previous chapter, American soldiers were billeted at 'Chalford' for a number of years in the early 1940's prior to Bert purchasing the property and the blackout blinds which they put up at the windows were still being used by Bert several decades later. These were anchored down to the window ledges each night with copper saucepans!

His daughter Lindsay said,

***"My friends often referred to 'Chalford' as Narnia in Four Oaks. It was a magical place. Growing up, I thought this was how it was for everyone, I didn't realise how lucky we were. We all had different personalities in the family, but there was always enough room for us all to do whatever we wanted."***

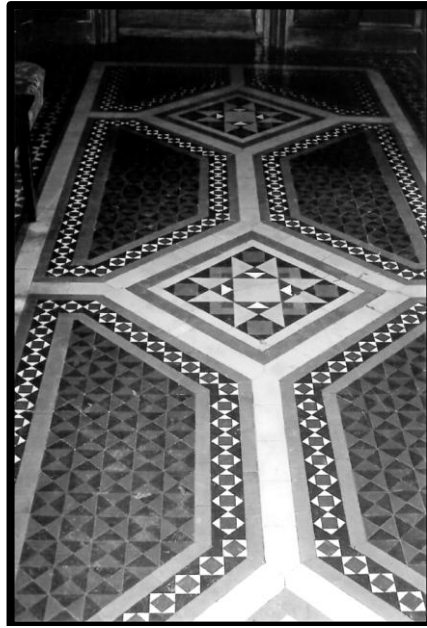
***Because my father wished to have a very private home life, hardly anyone was invited to the house, even friends and, as children, we weren't encouraged to bring school friends back. I was, however, very gregarious and I managed to sneak a few in and, eventually, they just became like part of the family and some still come to visit us now.***

***As nothing in the house had changed since it was originally built back in the 1880's, growing up meant you could be anyone and anything. It made myself and my brother fascinated with costumes, dressing up and nursery games".***



**Aerial View of 'Chalford', a haven of peace and rest for Bert Smith.**

The following photographs provide a small insight into the many interesting features contained within the property, which add to its unique character.



**Minton patterned tiles in main Hallway.**



**Main Hall with front Entrance Door leading to Porch. Note the beautiful wood panelled walls.**



**Stained glass windows in G F Cloakroom.**



**Main staircase with feature windows & domed ceiling to half-landing.**



**First floor landing with feature arches & latticed ceiling detail.**





**Twin brick pillars, supporting pedestals topped with fluted urns, for flower displays.**

Lindsay Brown went on to say,

*“The technological age just never hit us. Whenever we walked up the driveway, it was like going back in time.*

*Lazy Sundays in the Summer time were spent feeding the many hens and ducks that strutted and waddled around the grounds, whilst some week-ends croquet matches would be played on the lawn.”*



**Bert Smith with ‘Gregg’ his devoted 10-stone black Great Dane.**

After a very successful life, Bert sadly died in December 2002 aged 84, after a long but, ultimately unsuccessful, battle with cancer.

The family continued to live at 'Chalford' until 2008, when the Trustees of Herbert Smith's Estate finally decided to put the property up for sale and auction off all the contents of the house.

Arrangements for the auction were placed into the hands of Charles Hanson of Hansons Auctioneers, Etwall, Derbyshire.

Charles Hanson said,

***"Walking into the house on the first occasion was like walking back in time."***



**Auctioneer Charles Hanson & Lindsay Brown prior to the Auction.**

'Chalford' was opened to the general public on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2008 from midday to 8.00pm and, the following day, from 9.00am until midday. A marquee was set up on the lawn and the auction itself took place on the Saturday afternoon. Refreshments were served throughout the viewing and sale days.



**Marquee in the grounds of 'Chalford', where the auction took place.**



**Some of the items to be auctioned, laid out on the lawn.**



**A view of the grounds at the rear of 'Chalford'.**

Articles in the local newspapers the week before the auction was due to take place, resulted in hundreds of local residents and antique enthusiasts descending upon 'Chalford' on the first viewing day. Belwell Lane and Clarence Road were choked with traffic and parked cars and, eventually, the police had to be called in for order to be restored!

It was estimated that approximately 1,200 availed themselves of the opportunity to look around the house and grounds. So great were the numbers that a chain had to be put across the driveway, just inside the entrance from Belwell Lane, to control the number of visitors from entering at any one time.



Some of the locals waiting to view 'Chalford' on the 6<sup>th</sup> June 2008.

The auction itself also threw up many surprises. Bert Smith was an avid supporter of Walsall Football Club and had accumulated a good collection of early 1930's football programmes. These ended up being one of the star items, as they were eventually sold to a private collector for a princely sum of £2,000.

Lindsay Brown said,

*"A friend had persuaded me not to put them in a skip; that friend is now elevated to sainthood. We were sitting upstairs and listening to the auction and our eyes were getting wider as the bidding went on."*

Other items which fetched substantial amounts were, as follows:-

'Mary Poppins' style Governess Cart circa 1870. (This was the Cart originally purchased for Bert when he was aged 13 – see earlier in Chapter)	£ 750.00
Pair of South Pacific Ivory War Clubs circa 1880, which the Smith family had had in their possession since Victorian times.	£1,050.00
Desk circa 1775.	£5,000.00
Hallway Chest of Drawers circa 1880.	£3,000.00
Teddy Bear circa 1918.	£ 500.00
Longcase Clock.	£2,000.00
Collection of 4 Derby Porcelain Figures circa 1770.	£3,000.00
Collection of Diamond Rings.	£1,500.00
Four Piece Silver Tea Set.	£ 650.00

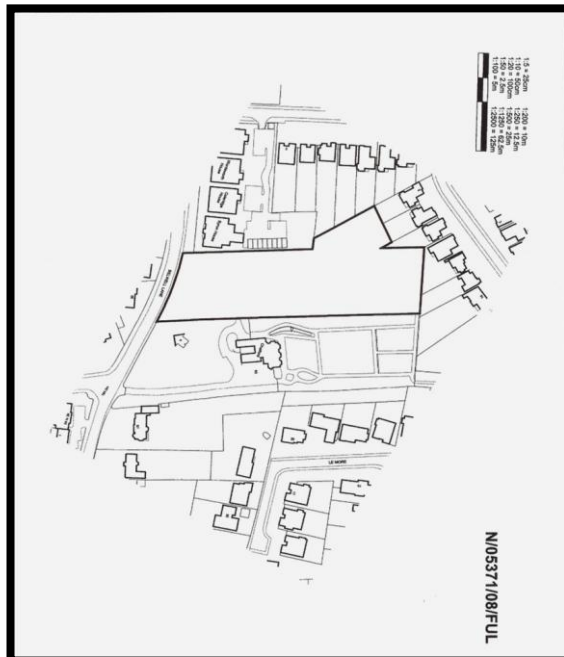
The following month the property, including 1.65 acres of ground, was placed on the market for sale, at a purchase price of £1M, through Quantrills of Sutton Coldfield and Llewellyns of Walsall.

Unfortunately, despite there being several interested parties, the recession was beginning to take effect and a sale could not be finalised.

Eventually 'Chalford' was placed back onto the market again via Quantrills, approximately 12 months later, in August 2009, at a reduced price of £895,000. At the time this research was being completed, the outcome was still unknown.

Whilst all this was taking place, the Trustees were finalising the sale of the remaining land, originally used by Bert Smith as a paddock for his horses.





**Plan of land purchased by Banner Homes Limited for development.**

The purchaser was a Builder named Banner Homes (Midlands) Limited of Redditch, who obtained planning permission to erect nine 4 and 5 bedroomed luxury homes around a small cul-de-sac, with an entrance off Belwell Lane.

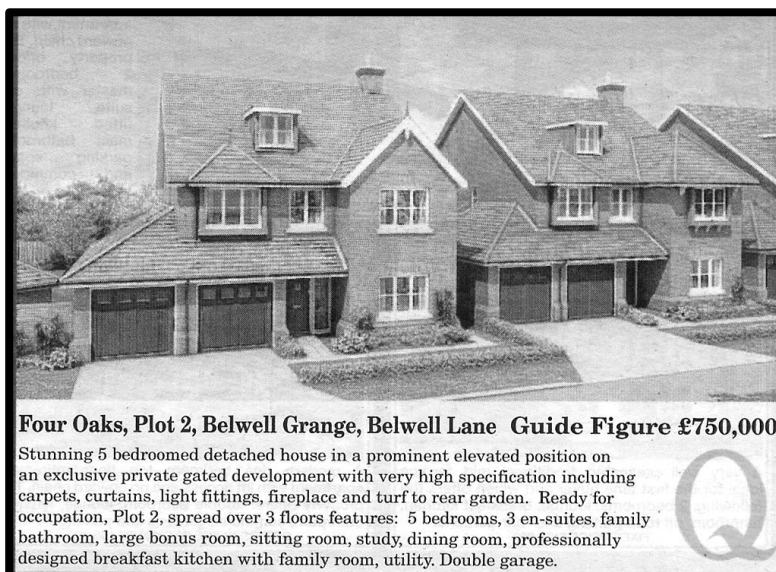


**Layout of Banner Homes development.**



**Banner Homes development, now called 'Belwell Grange', nearing completion.  
July 2009.**

The sale of these properties, at the time of writing up my research, was well under way, at prices in the region of £750,000.



**Four Oaks, Plot 2, Belwell Grange, Belwell Lane Guide Figure £750,000**

Stunning 5 bedroomed detached house in a prominent elevated position on an exclusive private gated development with very high specification including carpets, curtains, light fittings, fireplace and turf to rear garden. Ready for occupation, Plot 2, spread over 3 floors features: 5 bedrooms, 3 en-suites, family bathroom, large bonus room, sitting room, study, dining room, professionally designed breakfast kitchen with family room, utility. Double garage.

**Sales particulars advertising the new Banner Homes development**

When Banner Homes initially moved onto the land to prepare the site to enable building to commence an incident occurred, which brought old memories flooding back for the Smith family.

A box was found buried on the land and it emerged Herbert Smith had made up a 'memory box' after 'Dolly's' death, unbeknown to his wife. The box was crammed full of information, from a eulogy that he had written, to rolls of photographs documenting 'Dolly's' life.

Herbert's widow said:

*"It was a total surprise when Banner Homes contacted me regarding the 'memory box' of 'Dolly', as I had no idea that my husband had made and buried such a tribute. It was lovely to see the photographs once again and it allowed me to take a trip down memory lane. Herbert always had a love of animals and our home was full of pets, including lambs, ducks, geese, turkeys, rabbits, guinea pigs, fish and aviaries containing numerous birds. It seemed that if an animal needed a home, then our door was always open. For a lasting memento of 'Dolly' to be found after all these years is very touching and I'm sure Herbert would be pleased that his 'memory box' has resurfaced."*

Perhaps this is a fitting moment in which to end the interesting and chequered history of the property known as 'Chalford'.

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