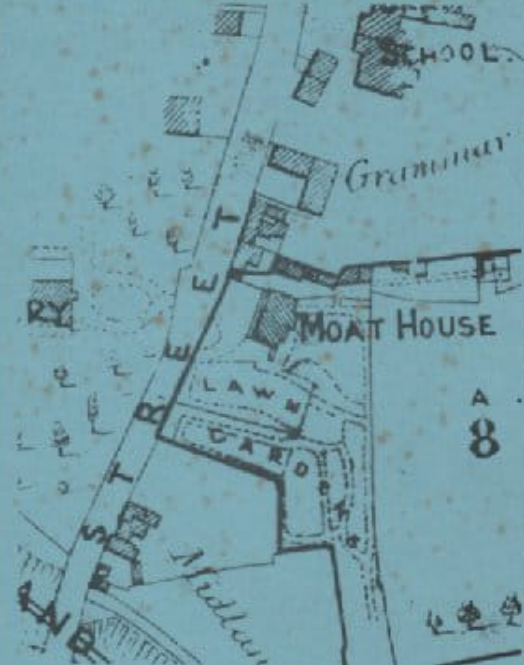


THE MOAT HOUSE AND ITS OWNERS



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THE MOAT HOUSE AND ITS OWNERS

The Moat House which is now owned by the Birmingham District Council, and used as the Sutton Coldfield Teachers' Centre, is one of the most interesting and important of the buildings in the area. In architectural style it is unique in Sutton Coldfield, while historically it has been owned by several of the most eminent families to live in the Town over nearly three hundred years. Any study of the building and its inhabitants is therefore of great value in casting light on the more general history of Sutton Coldfield. The architect and first owner was Sir William Wilson, about whose early life much remains to be discovered.

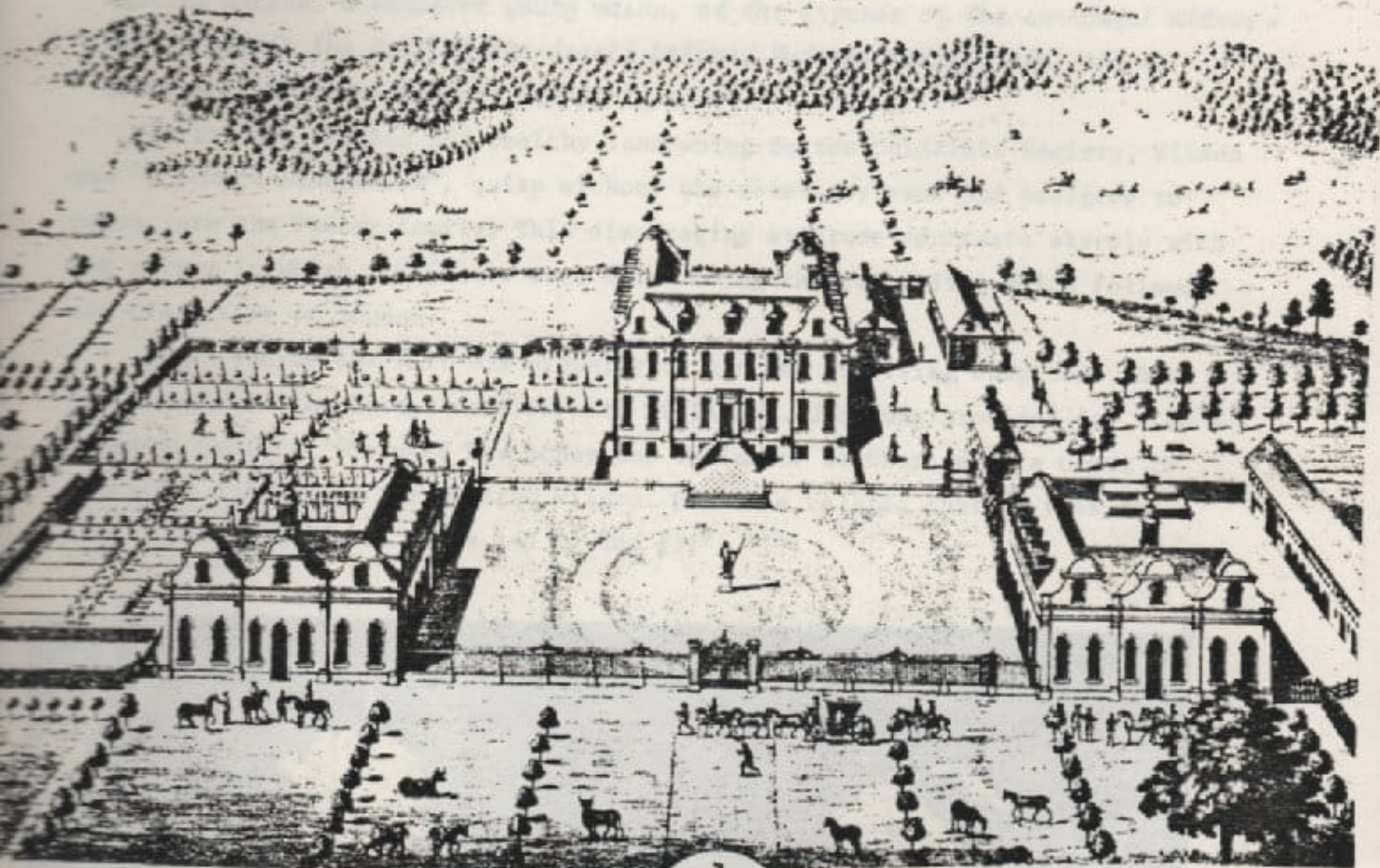


PORTRAIT OF SIR WILLIAM WILSON.

He was born in Leicester in 1640. Opinions as to the quality of his work are varied. Colville, writing in 'The Worthies of Warwickshire' (1869), described him as "not a person of any extraordinary talent", but he is elsewhere described as "an ingenious artist". (1) Wilson worked on a large number of projects in the Midland Region, both as a sculptor and as an architect of the Wren School.

W.K.Riland-Bedford noted that most of the older houses in Sutton Coldfield "bore traces of his influence". (2) He carved "a tasteless image" (3) of Charles II in the North-West Tower of Lichfield Cathedral and supervised the renovation of Nottingham Castle between 1681 and 1683. Here he carved a statue of the Duke of Newcastle, which was unceremoniously destroyed during the Reform Bill riots of 1831.

Wilson built Four Oaks Hall for Lord Ffolliot, an Irish peer, who became his wife's son-in-law. He has been attributed with the design of Peddimore Hall in Walmley in 1659 (4). However, he would have been only nineteen at the time.



FOUR OAKS HALL.

He became County Architect for Warwickshire, and in 1694 began the rebuilding of St. Mary's Church, Warwick, after a disastrous fire. It is apparent that his work was well-respected in the Midlands area. In 1679, he had followed his father in being created a Freeman of Leicester, (5) it was his fame as a sculptor which brought about Wilson's marriage, and thus the building of the Moat House.

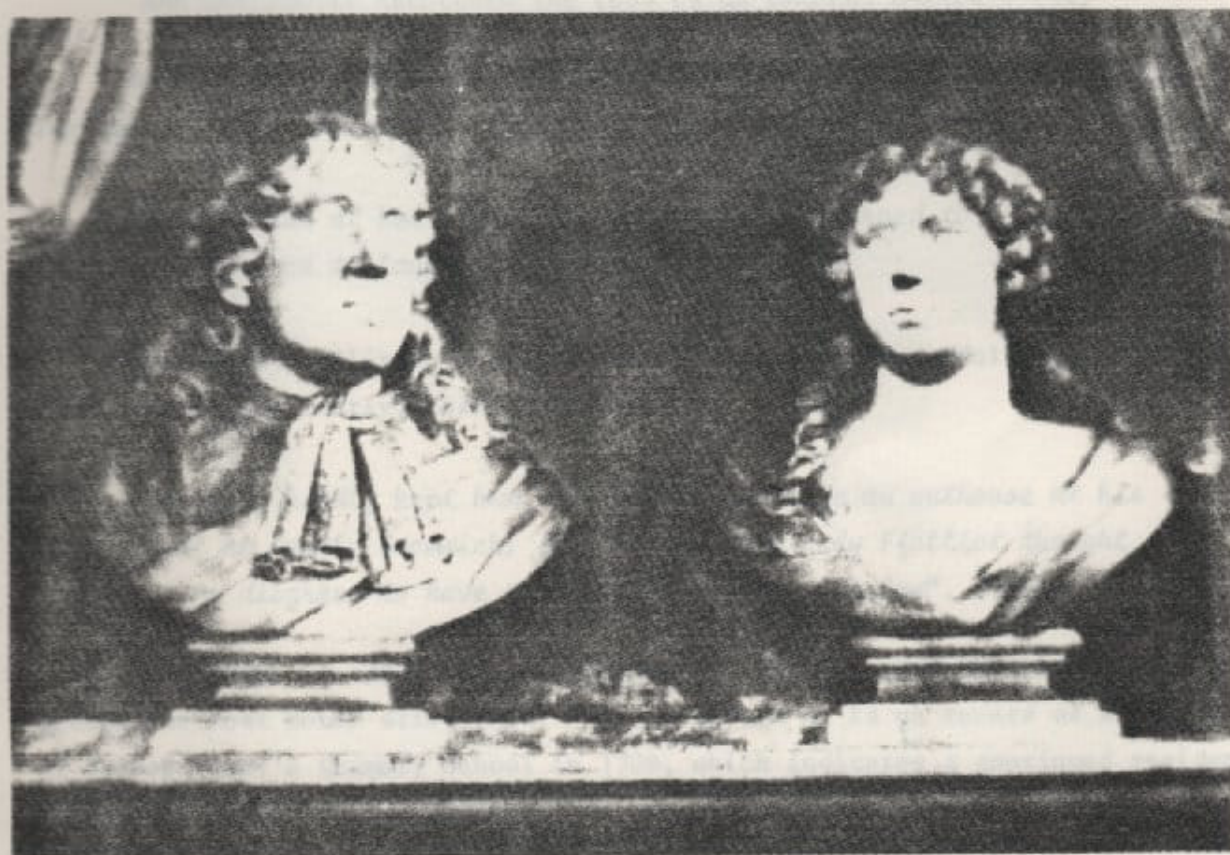
W. Midgley, a local historian, wrote of "the amazing marriage of Jane, the widow of the last of the Pudseys, to the sculptor whom she had engaged to carve the monument of her husband". (6)

Henry Pudsey, who died in 1677, was the wealthiest man in the Sutton Coldfield area (7). He had lived in a moated mansion in Walmley, called Langley Hall. (Parts of the Hall can still be seen in Ox Leys Road, between Springfield Road and Wishaw). After Pudsey's death, Wilson was commissioned to carve his monument in the Vesey Chapel in Sutton Coldfield Parish Church. In 1762, "The History of Sutton Coldfield" (8) spoke disparagingly of -

"William Wilson, a handsome young mason, at the expense of the sorrowful widow, who to repair the loss of her dearly beloved Pudsey, married him; and to complete the farce, brought him up to town".

To the established and wealthy landowning Sutton Coldfield Society, Wilson was "a common stonemason", quite without the necessary rank and pedigree to marry into the Pudsey family. This disparaging attitude contrasts sharply with the esteem in which architects were held during the rebuilding which followed the Great Fire of London.

Henry Pudsey had left his property to his two surviving daughters, Anne and Elizabeth (the latter married Lord Ffolliot). Jane was provided for with a handsome annuity. She used her money and influence at Charles II's Court to procure a knighthood for William Wilson. Colville related that at this time "his lady had £300 per annum and he had £3!". (9)



THE PUDSEY TOMB IN SUTTON COLDFIELD CHURCH.

Ashmole's Diary of 10.3.1681 has the following short story entry --:
"Lodge at Masons's Hall, London, Sir William Wilson, Knight, admitted to Fellowship of Freemasons". (10).

Wilson, the common stonemason, was now a knight and an honoured freemason. Whether these recognitions were appreciated by Sutton's wealthy householders is open to doubt. Wilson was determined to provide a worthy home for Jane, doubtless purchasing land and materials with his wife's money!

At some period during the 1680's Moat House was built. The exact dating of the building can only be estimated. Riland-Bedford wrote of "*the style compounded of Inigo Jones and the Dutch taste of King William's Day*". The mansion house which Wilson erected was surrounded by a large, artificial moat. Wilson wished that feature to be compared to the moat at Langley Hall. (The name 'Moat House' does not appear to have been used until the moat had been filled in, nearly two hundred years later). The main entrance of the House was approached by a bridge from Lichfield Road, which crossed the moat, sunken and planted with shrubs.

Wilson's marriage produced no children, and it is likely that Jane was some years senior to her husband. She died many years before her stonemason, and was buried in the Pudsey vault at the Parish Church. Without his wife's secure income, Wilson's remaining days were spent without luxury. It was observed that

"...he living up to the extent of his apron-string estate, and his lady dying before him, Sir William returned to his former occupation, and the public recovered the loss of an eminent artist". (12)

Another writer confirms that Wilson resumed his employment and gives an insight into his character, noting that

"Sir William at her death very contentedly returned to his old trade.. .. and used to laugh at his title". (13)

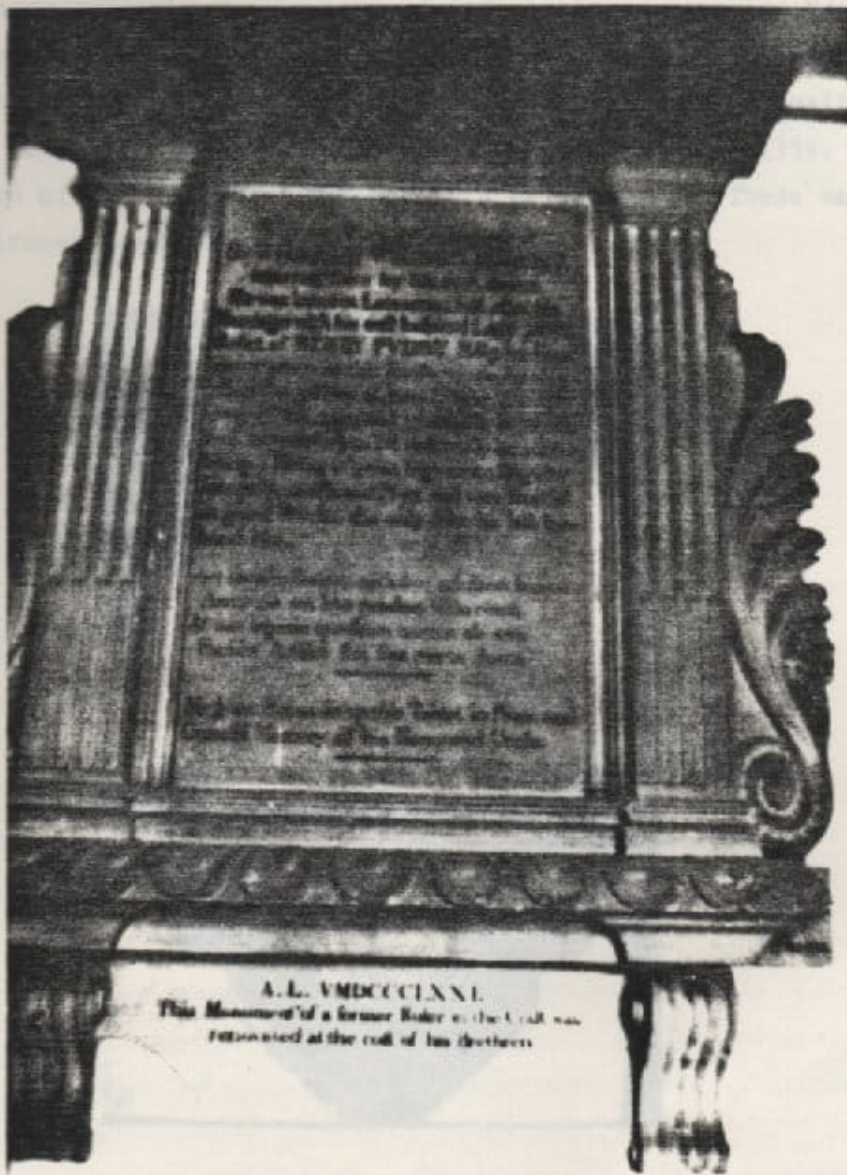
Fortunately, Elizabeth Pudsey, who had married Lord Ffolliot, showed him much favour. Apparently, Lord Ffolliot

'not only kindly kept him, but let him work in an outhouse at his seat at Castle Bromwich; for the Lord and Lady Ffolliot thought it no disgrace to have a mason for a father-in-law". (14)

From this, it can be questioned whether Wilson continued permanently to occupy the Moat House after about 1700, although he is on record as a trustee of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School in 1709, which indicates a continued residence in Sutton Coldfield and a position of some esteem. (15)

Other members of the Pudsey family appear not to have accepted Wilson, even in old age, with the Ffolliot's generosity. Before his death in 1710, Wilson had requested to be buried beside his wife, and was refused. In words which have been widely quoted, Wilson stated

"I will be buried on the outside of the Church, directly OPPOSITE the vault where my wife lies, and there will be only a single stone wall betwixt us: and as I am a stonemason, there will be no kind of labour or difficulty in cutting my road through the wall to my old bed-fellow". (16)



WILSON MEMORIAL.

In 1874, with the building of the Clergy Vestry, the plot over Wilson's grave became part of the interior of the Church. A memorial to him was placed on the rear of the wall holding the Pudsey monument.

In his will, Wilson left the Moat House to his nephew John Barnes. Interestingly he also established the "Sir William Wilson Charity". This was designed "for apprenticing poor children whose parents are inhabitants of the Parish of St. Nicholas, in Leicester". (17). He had not forgotten his own birthplace, and specified that all succeeding owners of the Moat House should pay £10 per year to the Charity. (The annual annuity was finally redeemed in 1885 by Richard and Ralph Sadler).

Very little is yet known about John Barnes, nephew of Sir William Wilson, and inheritor of the Moat House in 1710. Apart from the evidence contained in his will, there are only two sources of information concerning Barnes. Firstly, mention is made of him "as a Warden of Sutton Coldfield's Society" in 1712.(18) Secondly, there is a memorial tablet in the Parish Church (opposite the organ) which records the death of "John Barnes, only son of John Barnes" (19). There is also a record of the death of John Barnes's wife Barbara. These memorials are mentioned without comment by Miss Bracken.



BARNES MEMORIAL

From his will, it appears that Barnes was the owner of a significant amount of property in Sutton Coldfield, but that, like his uncle, he had reached financially-embarrassing circumstances in later life. His will was marked that he left less than £20 worth of moveable goods.



MOAT HOUSE

The Moat House itself was apparently occupied by "Edward Birch, Gentleman", and was left to William Lunn, Barnes's nephew. He was only able to claim the House by "*paying and discharging all the principal sum of two hundred pounds and all the interest that is or shall be found due....*"

Various tenement lands and premises are further mentioned, all being "*mortgaged to the said Edward Birch.*"

Among the properties were "a messuage or tenement... with the barn, stable, garden, yard and two crofts in the hands of ...John Bird"; and another property "together with the shop, garden... now in the possession of Thomas Bagshot" and "my smith's shop..." This last entry may hold significance, since Barnes described himself as a "stonecutter". It is possible that he came to live and work in a small building close to John Bird's tenements.

Barnes left his remaining "messuages, tenements, lands and hereditment..." to his niece Roberta (or Robina?) Tharker, spinster. The impression, which may be altered by further evidence, is of a formerly prosperous landowner who had for some reason met severely reduced circumstances.

There is further uncertainty as to the occupation and ownership of the Moat House after Barnes's death. At some stage between 1748 and 1760 the House came into the ownership of Joseph Duncumb. He made the purchase from William Lunn, indicating that Barnes's nephew had redeemed the mortgage. In an abstract of the title to the Moat House made in 1872, mention is made of land "*previously in the possession of Edward Byrch, Gent... purchased by the said Joseph Duncumb off and from William Lunn of Ditsworth*". (20)

"Aris's Gazette" described Duncumb as "one of the Capital Burgesses of that place (Sutton Coldfield) and in the Commission of the Peace for this County". (21)

Duncumb's lasting memorial is Blackroot Pool, in Sutton Park. In 1759, he was granted permission, with Edward Homer, to establish a leather mill in the Park.

Blackroot Pool was created to provide the water-power for this purpose. It can be assumed that Duncumb was the energetic partner in this scheme. Homer, who was Deputy-Steward of the Corporation, was condemned by Rev. W.K. Riland-Bedford for causing the deterioration of valuable Town Archives and documents "by the corrosion of droppings of port wine, from bottles which he kept for his own refreshment in the same coffer with those ancient documents". (22)

In 1760-61, Duncumb was the Warden of Sutton Coldfield. (23). He seems to have accumulated wealth as a member of the Corporation. This body had been established under Bishop Vesey's Charter to act as Sutton Coldfield's municipal authority. Unfortunately it was a self-appointing body, which drew constant allegations from the people of the Town that its members were profiting from their positions by using areas of the Park at cheap rents, selling timber for their own advantages, and by enclosing common lands among themselves. In 1778, during Duncumb's period as a member of the Corporation, it was seriously proposed that the Park itself should be enclosed and divided among the landlords of the Town (24). Duncumb was a keen huntsman. He had outbuildings added to the Moat House to accommodate his hounds. (25) An amusing anecdote was related by the Rev. W.K. Riland-Bedford concerning the effects of Duncumb's sporting passion:

"On one occasion, a valuable hunter of Mr. Duncumb's was missing from its stable. Search was made and rewards offered in vain, until it was discovered quietly feeding in the hayloft above, having walked up a flight of brick steps... Some difficulty was experienced in lowering the animal to terra firma". (26)

Duncumb's properties were of considerable value. His will deposited at the Public Record Office in London indicates that, in addition to Moat House and its surrounding lands, Duncumb owned the following :

- farms and tenements in Hill "which I have lately purchased"
- crofts and houses in Four Oaks and Little Sutton, "now in the occupation of James Brampton or his under-tenents"
- freehold lands in Roughley, occupied by Samuel Thompson
- lands in Little Charles Street, Aston Street and two other streets in Birmingham.

Duncumb left much land to his wife Elizabeth, with the condition that his daughter was to inherit these on her decease or remarriage. (In fact his daughter died fifteen years before her mother.) He also left his wife thirty dozen bottles of port wine and ten dozen bottles of raisin wine!

Elizabeth Duncumb, daughter, was Joseph's only child. She was twenty-five at his death. She inherited the Moat House, and seems already to have been engaged to marry Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins. A marriage treaty mentioned in item four of the Moat House deeds, had been drawn up early in 1793, presumably before Joseph Duncumb's death, since an estate at Moorbaron, Leics, was to be conferred upon the couple.

After Duncumb's death, a new marriage settlement was drawn up, and S.F.S. Perkins became effectively the owner of the Moat House. He also owned three crofts lying below Moat House, and "Vesey's Croft" on "the opposite side of the street." (This was land upon which the railway line to Walsall and part of the Police Station now stand).

The wedding took place on the 21st. May 1793. (Duncumb had died in the previous month, aged 77). Elizabeth lived for a further eight years, bearing three children who survived her. These were Duncumb, William and Elizabeth, known as Eliza. Her death occurred almost certainly after child-birth on the 27th. March 1801, when she was only 32. An infant son had died at birth exactly one week previously. (27)

Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins was a lawyer. Like his father-in-law, he held civic positions and extended his ownership of local lands. He continued to rent Blackroot Pool, which for many years was commonly known as "Perkins's Pool".

During the Napoleonic Wars, he was firstly Lieutenant of the Sutton Volunteers, which was a force of local militia, and later became a Major in the 1st. Regiment of the local Warwickshire Militia. (28)

Perkins was Warden of the Corporation in 1804, and influenced the administration of the Town for some fifty years. In 1817, he had published in the "Gentleman's Magazine" an article which overflowed with praise for the late William Pitt, the Younger.

Perkins's legal career included a significant connection with the trial of Abraham Thornton, charged in 1817 with the murder of Mary Ashford. He was one of the prosecuting lawyers in a case which became nationally famous. (The grandfather of Richard Hurst Sadler acted for the defence. See below).

In May 1817, Mary Ashford was found drowned in a marl-pit in Penns Lane. Abraham Thornton of Castle Bromwich was accused of her murder, but in the absence of all but the circumstantial evidence was acquitted. Local feeling against Thornton was extreme, and William Ashford, brother of the dead girl, took out a private summons against him. This was in effect an appeal against the "not guilty" verdict. Proceedings were heard before a judge in London, where Thornton astonished the court by issuing a challenge to "*trial by battle*"

against his accuser. This involved throwing down a gauntlet and declaring willingness to defend his innocence by fighting Ashford.

The dead girl's brother was small in physique and refused the challenge. "Trial by battle" had not been invoked for centuries, and was abolished hastily after the Ashford case. Thornton wisely emigrated to America, and apparently prospered.



The "Thornton Gauntlet" is still possessed by the Sadler family. (22) Much remains to be investigated concerning the career of Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins; it is known that he acquired further lands in the last year of his life in 1851, when an enclosure award was made relating to some of the common and waste lands in Sutton Coldfield. (30) This land included part of "Glebe Meadow" on "Upper Mettalls" and also the "Upper Piece". Both fields are believed to have been in the area between Sutton Coldfield and the present Rectory Park.

"Aris's Gazette" published S.F.S. Perkins's obituary early in 1852, writing that he -

THE GAUNTLET.

"died on Thursday at Sutton Coldfield, in his 84th. year. Shirley Farmer Steele Perkins of that place and of Orton Hall, Leics., one of Her Majesty's Deputy Lieutenants for the Counties of Warwick, and Leics., and a magistrate for the latter". (37)

It will be recalled that the Leicestershire lands were part of Perkin's original marriage settlement.

Although Perkins is believed to have married again (32), there is no mention of this second wife in his will. He left all his Leicestershire properties to his elder son, Duncumb, who was now a clergyman there.

"My mansion house (wherein I now dwell) at Sutton Coldfield" was left to William Steele Perkins, who had become long established in the legal profession, and who was living in the High Street, perhaps at the house presently occupied by Messrs Eddows, Perry and Osbourne. William also inherited "Vesey's Croft" and other surrounding lands. He continued to lease Blackroot Pool, and now owned 'Shooting Cottage' in Aston.

Eliza Steele Perkins, still unmarried, was left tenanted land in Sutton Coldfield, including 'Clifton Hills Fields.' She inherited many smaller items of interest. These included -

- a poste chaise, a pony carriage, and a brown pony
- a silver tea-pot, a coffee pot, six silver tea spoons, the afternoon best service of tea china, and a silver cream jug.
- two small cabinets,
- a cupboard in the bedroom, containing gold and silver coins and medals.
- *"the bed my daughter now sleeps in, with four pairs of sheets and two pairs of blankets and six towels or napkins"* (33)

Eliza Steele Perkins had lived at Moat House at least until her father's death (34). She had a reputation locally as a poet, and some samples of her works were published in 'The Warden' in September 1898. Rev. W.K. Riland-Bedford wrote that

"The granddaughter of the old Warden Duncumb, Miss Steele Perkins, was writing elegant and polished verses..." (35)

In 1863, she married Stanley Pipe Wolferstan of Statfold Hall in Tamworth.

There is a dearth of information so far discovered concerning William Steele Perkins. His inheritance came later in his life, after his personal career had become well-established. In 1833, he had become a member of the Corporation but never rose to the position of Warden. During the 1850's he was Clerk to the County Magistrates in Aston. He was also one of those Suttonians who strenuously opposed in 1855 an appeal for an elected body to replace the self-selecting Corporation. His most lasting action at Moat House seems to have been the in-filling of the famous moat in 1860. (36)

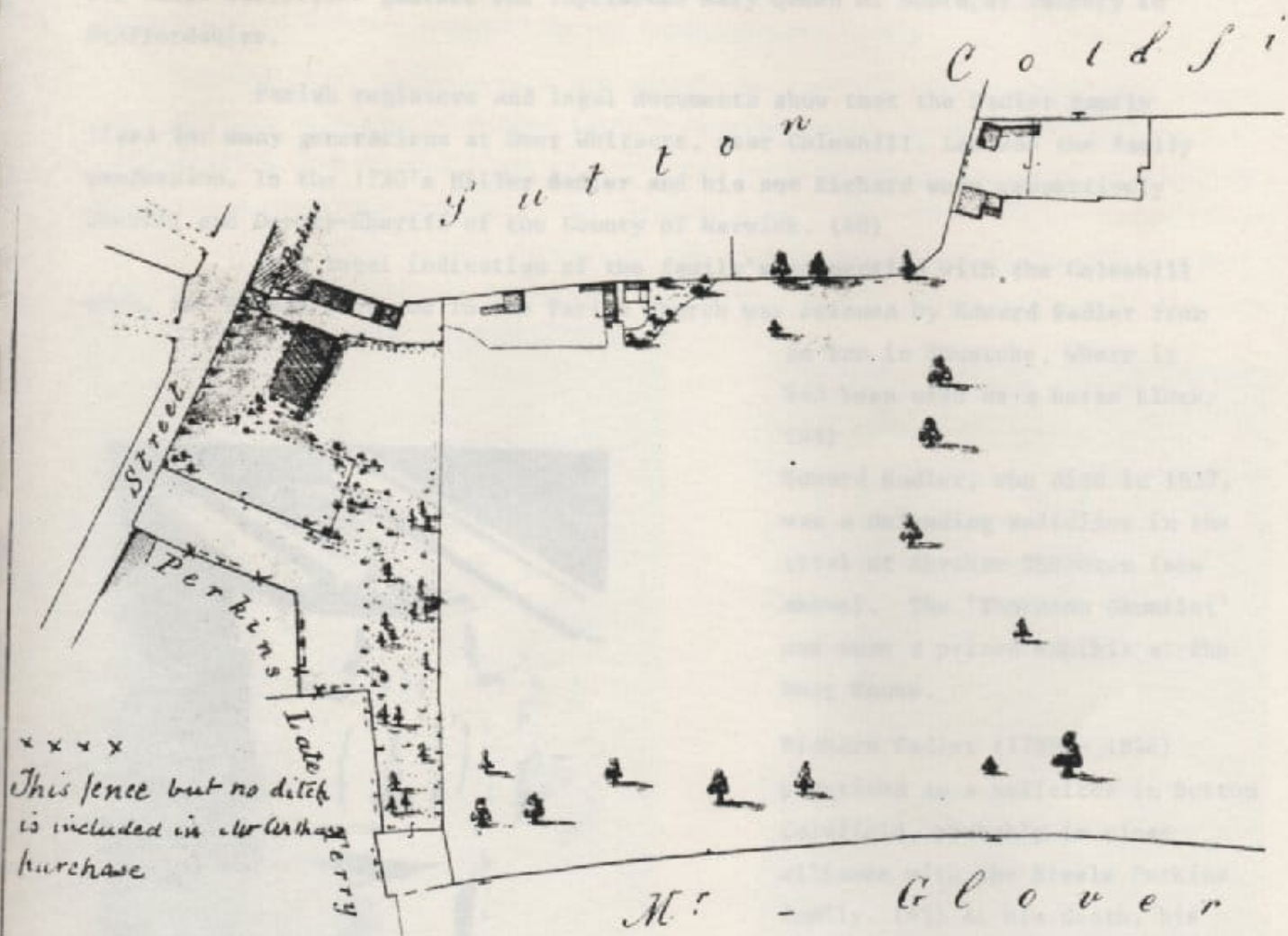
When he died in 1864, W.S.Perkins left a simple will, which had been compiled twenty years previously. All his property was inherited by Edmund Steele Perkins, his son. (37)

Edmund was the last of the Steele Perkins family to live in the Moat House. He was a solicitor, and seems to have been strongly opinionated. At the back of a heavily annotated book called 'Woolrych Game Laws' his impassioned pencil wrote that

"This book appears to have been written and published to instruct poachers how far they may impinge... the game laws with immunity. The author should be horsewhipped". (38)

In June 1869, E.S. Perkins sold the Moat House to Edward Arthars, 'gentleman and bachelor'.

In the conveyancing document, the Moat House and its surroundings were described as comprising a mansion house, buildings, yards, shrubberies, lawns, gardens, pasture, a meadow called 'The Mettalls', arable land, and a gateway at the entrance from the High Street. (This last feature can still be seen, immediately beside the present railway bridge.) Mention is also made of the surviving carriage gateway, and a room overhead "then used as an office by... Edmund Perkins". (39) Edward Arthars purchased the House and its lands for the princely sum of £5,525.



Arthars died shortly afterwards, in 1871. An auction sale was held in the following year at the Royal Hotel (now the "Old Royal" in the High Street). (see deed on page 12).

The Moat House, together with lands at the rear stretching towards the present Cemetery and Good Hope Hospital, was bought by the brothers Richard Hurst Sadler and Ralph Stanley Sadler. The remaining lands accumulated by S.F.S.Perkins were sold to other purchasers. The Sadler brothers were both born in Old Bank House, High Street, Sutton Coldfield. Their family crest can still be seen, moulded on to the crown of an arched coachway nearly opposite the 'Three Tuns'. They belonged to a proud family which traced its ancestry back to the Tudor statesman Sir Ralph Sadler, who guarded the imprisoned Mary Queen of Scots, at Tutbury in Staffordshire.

Parish registers and legal documents show that the Sadler family lived for many generations at Over Whitacre, near Coleshill. Law was the family profession. In the 1750's Miller Sadler and his son Richard were respectively Sheriff and Deputy-Sheriff of the County of Warwick. (40)

As a local indication of the family's connection with the Coleshill area, the Norman Font now in the Parish Church was rescued by Edward Sadler from

an inn in Shustoke, where it had been used as a horse block.

(41)

Edward Sadler, who died in 1837, was a defending solicitor in the trial of Abraham Thornton (see above). The 'Thornton Gauntlet' was once a prized exhibit at the Moat House.

Richard Sadler (1798 - 1856) practiced as a solicitor in Sutton Coldfield, probably in close alliance with the Steele Perkins family. (42) At his death, his sons Richard Hurst and Ralph Stanley were only nine and seven respectively. They nevertheless followed the family tradition, and qualified as solicitors, although Ralph never practised law.

After the purchase of the Moat House in 1872, the Sadler brothers jointly owned the property. Ralph lived there until his marriage in 1884, and sold his interest to his



NORMAN FONT.

brother in 1889 for £2,000. (43)

He moved to Doe Bank, a large house which once stood between Barker Road and Blackroot Road. Ralph's keen interests lay in agriculture and in hunting. He owned horses and was an enthusiastic member of the South Staffordshire Hunt. (He had also visited India, where he hunted tiger.) Unlike his brother, Ralph Sadler took no active interest in local or national politics, despite being a strong Unionist by conviction. (44)

One notable feature of the joint ownership of the Moat House was the severing of the connection with the Sir William Wilson Charity. In July 1885, the Sadlers paid a lump sum to the Charity, and the obligation of Moat House owners to pay an annual sum of £10 was redeemed by the Commissioners. (45)

Richard Hurst Sadler stands out sharply as a man of talent, energy and public distinction. Educated at Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, he displayed a flair for organisation from an early age. At nineteen years of age he was "Hon. Secretary of the Sutton Coldfield Institute and Reading Room", (46) which had its headquarters in the Old Town Hall in Mill Street. At twenty-two, R.H. Sadler became the youngest member of the Corporation, commencing a period of nearly fifty years in public life.



RICHARD SADLER IN HIS MAYORAL ROBES.



RICHARD SADLER'S WIFE EMMA,
PHOTOGRAPHED IN 1884.

He entered into partnership with Thomas Eddowes, at his own father's former office in the High Street. The partnership lasted until the latter years of the century when growing antipathy towards Eddowes's son, as well as pressure of other business interests, brought about its termination. (47)

In 1870, Sadler, together with George Boddington, the Rev. Albert Smith, and the Rev. W.K. Riland-Bedford, helped to found the "Sutton Coldfield News". (48)

By 1872, Sadler's firm was acting as local solicitors for the Midland Railway Company, who were planning to construct a line through Sutton Park. The building of this railway line provoked vast controversy in Sutton Coldfield. It was alleged that "hired thugs" were employed to break up meetings of those opposed to its construction. Parliament approved a Bill empowering the Railway Company to proceed, despite opposition from the Birmingham MP George Dixon and the then Councillor Joseph Chamberlain.

There was local support for the scheme, notably marshalled by "Mr. Boddington, an eccentric local doctor", who apparently persuaded "the cottagers of Sutton, men whose only knowledge of the park was that they pastured their donkeys there" that there was a prospect of cheap coal being transported from the Black Country. (49) The Corporation supported the proposal.

In 1874, R.H. Sadler married Emma Clisby from Harford, presumably from one of three towns of that name in Devon. (50) They subsequently had two daughters, Emma (1875 - 1953) and Ethel, who died in 1976 aged 98, as well as a son, Richard Edward (1881 - 1948). (51)

Sadler's business interests developed widely. He was a leading member of the consortium which established the ill-fated Four Oaks Racecourse Company in 1879. This Company purchased Four Oaks Hall and its surrounding lands, spending an additional £40,000 to develop a racecourse and its necessary facilities. The hope was of attracting racing enthusiasts from Birmingham and the Black Country. By 1890, it was clear that the project had failed, and the Company was wound up. (52) As an off-shoot of the scheme, the railway line from Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield was extended to Four Oaks, passing through the lower grounds of the Moat House. Thus some financial compensation accrued to R.H. Sadler through sale of this land. Another commercial venture, greatly more successful, came to dominate much of Sadler's life. This was the building and direction of the Great Western Arcade, near Snow Hill, in Birmingham. This was a pioneering venture in the establishment of a large, covered shopping area adjacent to a central railway station. Correspondence shows that Sadler largely worked from offices in the Arcade by 1900. (53)

In 1886, Sutton Coldfield gained civic status as a municipal borough. At last the Town had an elected council to replace the Corporation. Sadler became one of the first councillors, being returned for Trinity Ward. (54) Politics were relatively unimportant in the local context, but Sadler was described as "a Churchman and a Liberal". (55)

He was elected Mayor of Sutton Coldfield in 1903, and clearly served with such distinction that his term was twice extended. During his mayoralty, the new Town Hall was completed in King Edward Square. The foundation stone still bears Sadler's name. A local fire station was also opened. A public banquet was held in Sadler's honour in 1906, at which a gift of silver plate was made to him on behalf of the people of Sutton Coldfield. (56)

Throughout his active professional and political life, Sadler accumulated many responsibilities. These included being appointed Governor of Bishop Vesey's Grammar School, solicitor for the Borough and Municipal Charities, and Overseer of the poor and a Justice of the Peace. In 1910, he became an alderman.

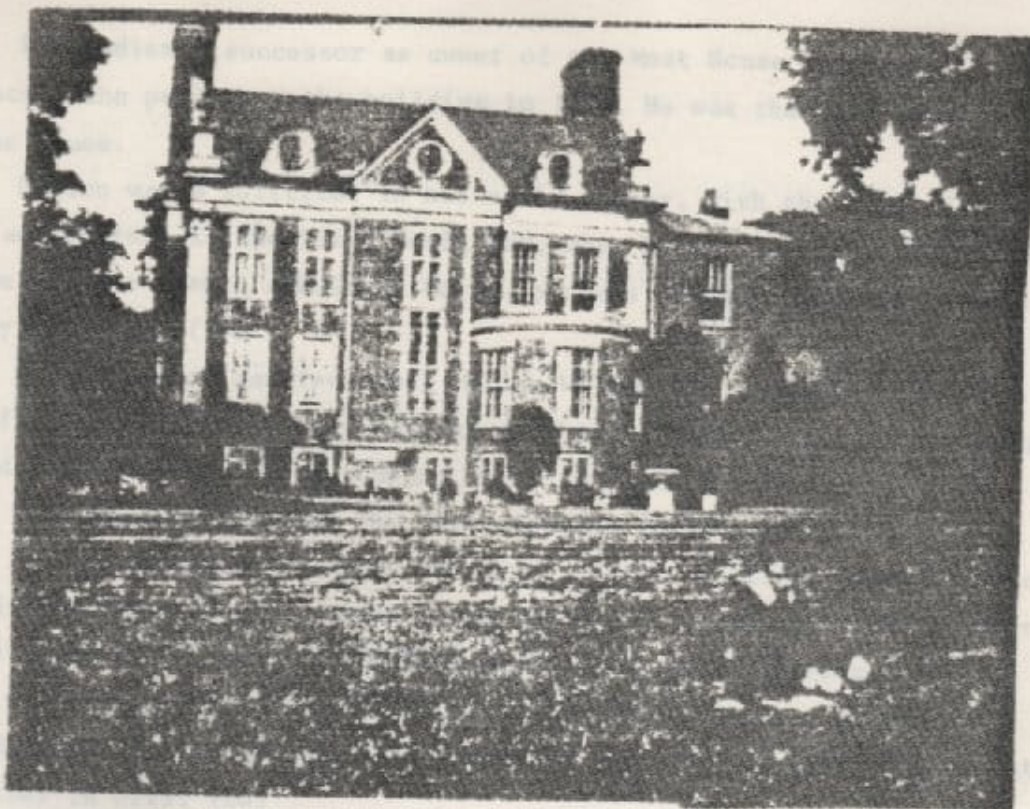
Moat House under Sadler's ownership was a warm and bustling town mansion, centre of an active family social life, as well as being used to entertain business and political associates. The considerable area of land still surrounding the House was partly developed by R.Edward Sadler for agricultural use. Cattle and pigs were kept.

MOAT HOUSE, THE TURN OF THE CENTURY.



MOAT HOUSE.

AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY.



MOAT HOUSE- THE TURN OF THE CENTURY.

Edward Sadler also initiated the link between Moat House and the Royal Sutton Coldfield Horse Show, which continued to be held annually in the grounds until 1958. (57)

Richard Hurst Sadler died in March 1917, after a long illness. As an indication of the extent of the House and its grounds at his death, the advertisement of sale placed in a local newspaper is most instructive:

"The very desirable freehold residential estate known as the Moat House, situate near the centre of Sutton Coldfield, and approached from the main road by carriageway sweep. The accommodation comprises: On the Ground Floor, Lounge Hall with panelled walls... Inner Hall, Drawing Room... Morning Room (with panelled walls) with stone steps leading to Garden, Dining Room with panelled walls, ...Butler's Pantry, ...fine oak staircase. On first floor are six Bed Rooms...large modern Bath Room ...on the second floor there are Four Bed Rooms and two Box Rooms. There is good domestic accommodation, including Kitchen, two Sculleries, Larder, Wash House, Cooks' Pantries and ample Cellarage...arched gateway with bedroom over...3-stall stable.. Coach or Motor House, Saddle Rooms...The grounds are exceptionally beautiful, including Tennis and Croquet Lawns, ample vegetable and fruit gardens, with sunk fence overlooking well-timbered park land...The farm buildings consist of brick and tile cowshed, piggeries and barn." (58)

R.H.Sadler's successor as owner of the Moat House was Arthur Woodall Heaton, who purchased the building in 1917. He was the last private owner of the House.

Heaton was a solicitor in his early career, with the firm of Hargreaves and Heaton. In the First World War, when he was in his late forties, Heaton served in the French Ambulance Corps, perhaps being considered too old for military service. (59)

Arthur Heaton married Ethel Marion Wilkinson, daughter of Colonel Wilkinson of Ashfurlong Hall. They had one daughter, Rosemary. He became Managing Director and later Chairman of a company known as William Hunt and Sons, of The Brades, Ltd. near Birmingham. The firm produced garden tools.

Heaton continued to allow the Royal Sutton Coldfield Horse Show to take place in the grounds of the Moat House. He did not take an active part in political or civic life, but was keenly interested in golf, playing at Little Sutton. His wife was an enthusiastic patron of the arts, being a prominent member of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Philharmonic Society, as well as a talented amateur painter in oils. (60)

The Moat House continued its long tradition as the centre of social life and business entertainment, and was once visited by the Duke of Gloucester in the late 1930's. (61)

A long period of uncertainty about the future of the House deeply concerned the Heaton's. In 1936, Warwickshire County Council attempted to place a compulsory purchase order upon the House and its grounds.

The Council wished to build a new police station and magistrates' court, to replace the ageing buildings in Station Street. Local opposition thwarted this scheme. (62)

In 1939, the Heaton's decided to sell the House, and it was offered for auction. However, failing to reach the reserve price of £3,950, it was withdrawn from sale. (63)

Arthur Heaton died in April 1947, aged 79. The Moat House was occupied by his wife until the following year, when a proposed sale by auction was cancelled in favour of a compulsory purchase order from the County Council. It became the Borough Education Office of the Sutton Coldfield Excepted District in 1950.

Rich furnishings gave way to stern desks, hard chairs and steel filing cabinets. Panelled walls were liberally concealed beneath thick municipal paint. The spacious and verdant grounds were overcome by the concrete and glass empire of the College of Further Education. Its period as a distinctive and homely mansion was at an end.

KEY TO SOURCES USED

1. Charles Deering, M.D., quoted in the Wren Society Vol. XI 1934, Article entitled "William Wilson".
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29. Information provided by Miss E.R.Meredith, M.B.E.,
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30. "Award of Mr.Thomas Wedge". 1851. Birmingham Reference Library.
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33. Moat House Deeds. Will of S.F.S.Perkins.
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36. P.101. Bracken.
37. Will deposited at the Birmingham Reference Library.
38. In the possession of Mr.K.Osbourne.
39. Item Three. Moat House Deeds.
40. Legal Diary in the possession of Mr.K.Osbourne.
41. P.8. Holy Trinity Parish Church Illustrated Guide.
42. Surmised from legal books bearing his name at the Offices of Eddowes, Perry & Osbourne, High Street, Sutton Coldfield.
43. Item Nine. Moat House Deeds.
44. Obituary of Ralph Sadler, in possession of Sutton Coldfield Teachers' Centre. Also information provided by Miss E.R.Meredith, M.B.E.,
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59. "Sutton Coldfield News". 12.4.1947.
60. Information provided by Mr.Harold Gray of Sutton Coldfield.
61. Information provided by Mrs.Vera Aplin of Baddesley Ensor, who, as Vera Sharp, was a servant at Moat House in the 1930's.
62. "Birmingham Post". 30.7.1936 and 1.8.1936.
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