

🎵 **Music and Prose** 📖

An account of an illuminated book published
in 1911 to celebrate the Coronation of
King George V and Queen Mary.

Written and illustrated by three local men,
two of whom were residents of Sutton Coldfield.

Also includes a brief account of the While family and their
associations with Sutton Coldfield in the 19th & 20th centuries.



Roy Billingham
2020

Harry Foster Newey, R.B.S.A., J.H. Ernest While and Edward Morton who in 1911 wrote and illustrated a book celebrating the Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary.

Details of the three contributors

Co-Illustrator: Harry Foster Newey, R.B.S.A. (1858-1933)

One of my current projects is researching the life of Harry Foster Newey, R.B.S.A., an artist, designer and naturalist who was born on September 22, 1858, at 104 Vyse Street in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. He was the son of a Birmingham architect and surveyor, Christopher Isaac Newey, and at the age of 12, his family then living in Harborne, was sent to board at a small private school at West Heath, Kings Norton, which was owned by the Birmingham non-conformist minister George Dawson, famously known for developing the concept of the Civic Gospel.

After leaving school, Harry went on to study art and design at The Birmingham Municipal School of Art in Margaret Street. His initial occupation was described as an artist designer and modeler silver (sic), presumably a modeller in silver, and in 1881, aged 21, was living with his parents and siblings at Charlton House, Heath Road, Harborne.

At the age of 25, Harry, who was now living in Francis Road, Edgbaston, and Kate Elizabeth Prudence Leeke, who lived in Monument Road, Edgbaston, married at the Parish Church of St. Barnabas in Erdington on June 25, 1884. His profession was given as artist. He and Kate then moved to 138 Mann Street in the Parish of St. Margaret, Birmingham, and soon started a family, Mabel Rose being born in 1885 and Erle Foster in 1888. Later, the family moved from the centre of Birmingham to live in the village of Hampton-in-Arden, Warwickshire, where a second daughter, Lorna Kathleen, was born in 1890. At that time, Harry's main occupation was recorded as an artist and sculptor.

In 1900, at the age of 42, he was appointed Principal of the Tunstall School of Modern Art in the Potteries, a post he held for eight years. He was described professionally on the 1901 England Census as an artist and designer. About 1911 he and his family – wife, son, and two daughters - moved from Tunstall to Sutton Coldfield, where his parents had already relocated from their previous home in Kenilworth. He lived for the rest of his life at "Craigmore" (Number 20) Coleshill Street just around the corner from his parents, who lived at "Milford House" in Victoria Road, after having previously lived at the "Priory" on the corner of Birmingham Road and Bishop's Road,

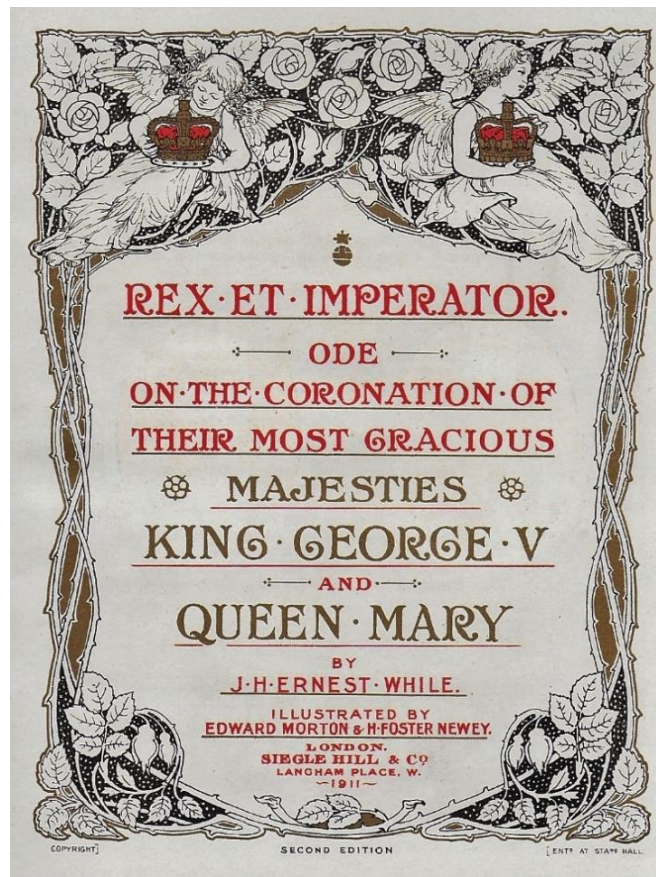


George Dawson, 1821-1876
The Birmingham non-conformist

Maney. Harry was elected initially as an Associate of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists in 1913 and then as a Member in 1927. His artist son, Erle Foster Newey (1888-1955), was also elected an Associate in 1927.

His name first came to my attention when I was researching the life of Albert Wood, who from 1892 to 1917 was the tenant of Midland Lodge in Sutton Park and a friend of Benjamin Stone, Sutton Coldfield's first mayor and a previous tenant of Midland Lodge, and of Thomas Beale Grove, owner of Wyndley Nursery, all three men being founder members of The Vesey Club. After Albert Wood's death in 1917, Harry Foster Newey donated via Thomas B. Grove two cases of natural history specimens to a project, set up by the then Mayor and Borough Surveyor, to create a natural history museum within Sutton Coldfield based around the unique natural history collection the Borough had purchased at the auction of Albert Wood's effects. Sadly, this project never materialised.

As well as being an artist and designer, Harry Foster Newey had an interest in natural history because on December 19, 1919 he chaired the first committee meeting of the original Sutton Coldfield Natural History Society and became its first President. This society ceased to exist from 1932 until it was re-formed in 1951.



Title page of John Henry Ernest While's book of 1911, Illustrated by Edward Morton and Harry Foster Newey.

Harry Foster Newey published one book on art in 1894, *“Elementary Drawing: being a few practical hints for art students and teachers”*, which was published by Chapman & Hall Ltd., London. Later, he was involved in the publication of a book by J.H. Ernest While, called *“Ode on the Coronation of their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary, 1911”*, for which he and Edward Morton, created the illustrations and artwork. This book is the main subject of this essay.

I recently purchased a second-hand copy of this book, a second edition of 1911 and in splendid condition. Each of the pages of this twenty-eight-page book is gloriously illuminated and illustrated to accompany the fifteen verses and a Coronation Hymn complete with music composed expressly for the work by the organist of Lichfield Cathedral, John B. Lott¹.

The words of both the “Coronation Ode” and “The King’s Crown” are very much of their age, a period three years before the outbreak of the First World War when Britain’s naval strength was at its zenith and Britannia could justifiably claim to rule the waves. At that time there was a threat from the changes afoot in the European political structure, as well as Britain’s relationship with the Kaiser’s Germany causing growing tensions between these two countries, not least because Germany had begun to build a navy that would threaten the superiority of the Royal Navy. The words of the ode are triumphal and have a feel similar to A.C. Benson’s words written for Elgar’s Pomp and Circumstance March No. 1, *“Land of hope and glory”*, a piece of music composed in 1901, and so popular that it formed the last movement of Elgar’s Coronation Ode, Op. 44, which was composed in 1902 for the Coronation of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra.

Whatever one’s choice of comparison, the words of this ode sound somewhat jingoistic to the modern ear, while those of the Coronation Hymn are strikingly royalist and triumphal in their phraseology. Some idea of the flourishing illustrative nature of the book can be seen in the picture of the book’s title page on the previous page and those pictures following.

In 1911, when the book was published, Ernest While was forty years of age and Harry Foster Newey was aged fifty-three years. John Browning Lott, the Lichfield Cathedral organist was aged sixty-two years and had been the organist at Lichfield Cathedral for thirty years.

Harry spent his time after the First world war as a full-time artist painting mainly landscapes, both in the United Kingdom and in Europe. He also painted scenes set in Sutton Park but there are no photographs on the internet of these paintings which I suspect are for the most part in private local collections.

Harry Foster Newey died at Sutton Coldfield on October 6, 1933, aged 75. His widow continued living with her younger daughter Mabel Rose Salt at 20 Coleshill Street until 1951. Lorna, his younger daughter, never married while Erle Foster Newey, his son, married Gertrude Follows and they lived at various abodes in Birmingham and Warwickshire. Erle like his father was an artist, as well as an illuminating artist. He died on October 19, 1955, at 40 Prince of Wales Road, Weymouth, Dorset, aged 67.

¹ **John Browning Lott (1849-1924)** was born at Faversham in Kent and installed as organist at Lichfield Cathedral in 1881 and remained in that post until his death at Buxted, Sussex, on 29th September 1924. He was Conductor of Lichfield Musical Society for 25 years and joint editor with Dr. C. Charlton Palmer of a series of ‘Arrangements for the Organ’. He also composed church music and part-songs, etc.

The author: J.H. Ernest While (1871-1938)

J. H. Ernest While was Christened John Henry Ernest While but appears to have preferred to have been known as Ernest. He was born during the final quarter of 1871 at Maney in Sutton Coldfield and was the first child of George While, a brass founder with company premises in Nechells, and his wife Sarah Ann While (née Carter), who were married in the autumn of 1869 and from about 1870 lived at "The Elms" on the main road (later named Birmingham Road) in Maney. They, like many Birmingham manufacturing entrepreneurs, had migrated northwards from Aston to semi-rural Sutton Coldfield in order to escape the industrialised environment of Birmingham. John While, Ernest's grandfather, was also living nearby at "The Laurels" in Maney.

By the time of the 1881 England Census, George While was registered as a widower. His wife seems to have died shortly after the birth of their youngest child in 1879. The Census listed seven children ranging in age from nine years down to two years - John Henry Ernest (our author), George Herbert, Alice Mabel, Millicent and Ethel (twin daughters), Helen Emily, and the youngest being Sarah Ann Carter who was obviously named after her mother. This suggests that Sarah Ann Carter While, the mother, probably died as a result of complications in childbirth. The household included two general servants and a young nurse.

The 1901 England Census records that George Herbert While, also a brass founder and now aged 27, had left the parental home and was living at "Fairbourne" in While Road in Maney with his wife Lydia Kathleen Haines; the Census records that they had a son, Howard Haines While. George Herbert's remaining siblings, whose ages now ranged from late to early twenties, were still living at "The Elms" in Birmingham Road with their father, George While. There was now only a housekeeper employed at their home. J.H. Ernest While's profession was given as printers clerk.

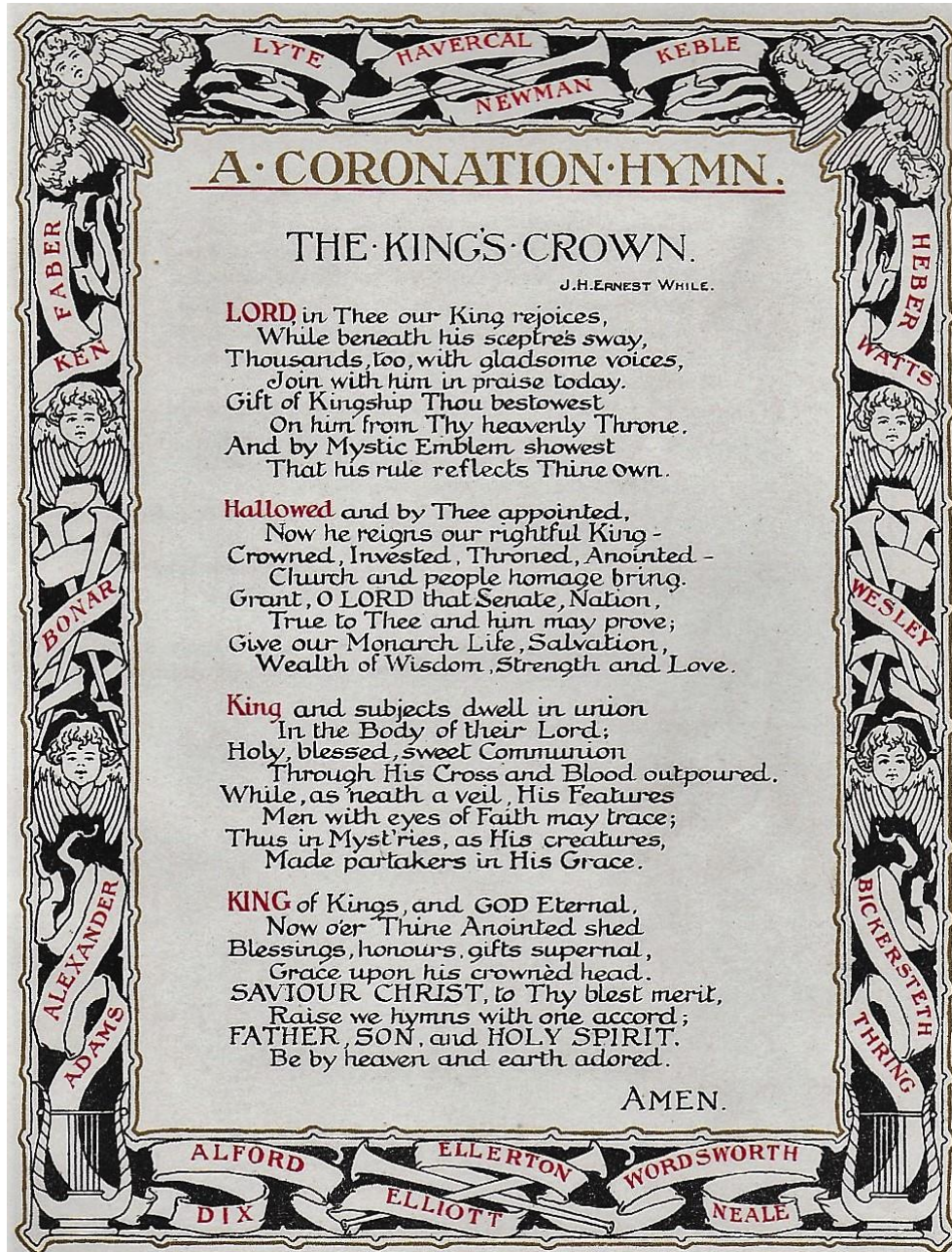
Three years after George While's death, the 1911 England Census indicated that the While family, previously living at "The Elms" in Maney, had dispersed and J. H. Ernest While was now living at "Ingleshthorpe" in Coleshill Road with Ethel While, one of his twin sisters. His profession was given as printer and lithographer. It was in this year that he wrote the *"Ode on the Coronation of Their Most Gracious Majesties, King George V and Queen Mary"* and a Coronation Hymn, *"The King's Crown"*.

By 1918 the Sutton Coldfield Register of Electors shows that Ernest and his sister Ethel had moved from Coleshill Road into their brother's vacant house, "Fairbourne", in While Road. In 1925, Ernest and Ethel were joined by their youngest sibling, Sarah Ann Carter While. Their property, "Fairbourne" in While Road, had by 1928 been allocated a house number of 7, and the Register for that year records that Ernest and Sarah Ann had been joined by their sister Helen Emily While. Late in 1932, Ernest and his sister Sarah Ann Carter While decamped from While Road and moved to a house on the newly constructed Wyvern Road transferring the house-name "Fairbourne" to their new home. By 1935 they had been joined by their sister Helen Emily While.

J.H. Ernest While, who was unmarried, died on January 11, 1938, aged 66. His address at the time of his death was "Fairbourne", Wyvern Road in Four Oaks. Probate was granted on February 8, 1938, to his oldest sibling, George Herbert While, a retired manufacturer. Ernest's estate was valued at £892. Following Ernest's death, Sarah Ann and Helen Emily While continued to occupy what became No.9 Wyvern Road both up to the Second World War and throughout the war years

until 1946 when the house was temporarily occupied by the Plowright family. Sarah Ann and Helen Emily resumed occupation in 1947 and continued to occupy the house until 1953.

A Coronation Hymn by J.H. Ernest While



Above is a facsimile of J.H. Ernest While's words to a Coronation Hymn entitled *The King's Crown*. On the following page is the musical score for *The King's Crown* composed by John Browning Lott, the organist of Lichfield Cathedral.

A CORONATION HYMN
"CORONA REGIS."

Composed expressly for this Hymn by
 John B. Lott Mus. Bac. Oxon. F.R.C.O.
 Organist of Lichfield Cathedral.

Brighly and firmly. 8.7.8.7.D.

O, COME SING UNTO THE LORD LET US

A ... MEN.

The music composed by John Browning Lott, organist at Lichfield Cathedral

The Third Man, Edward Morton – Co-Illustrator

In my initial researches I was unable to discover much about Edward Morton, the other contributing artist to Ernest While's book, or examples of his illustrative work, and how he and Harry Foster Newey shared the task of illustrating this book. However, by sheer coincidence, I

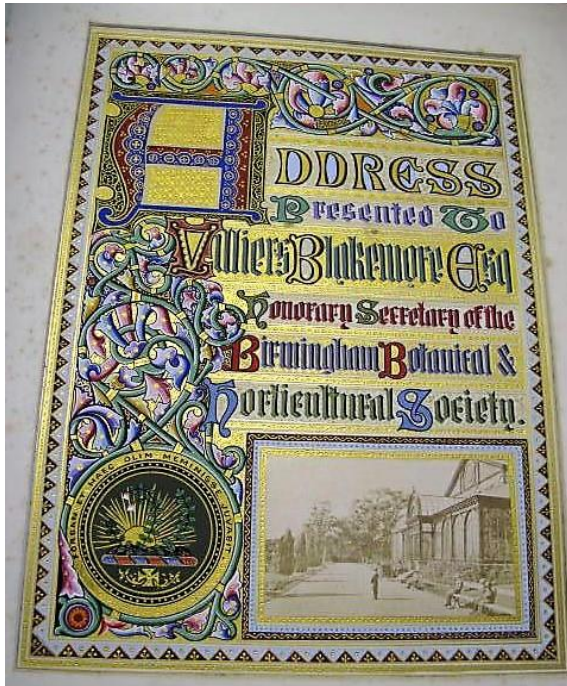
received in the post a recently published book² about the centennial history of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (1920-2020). On opening the book and flicking through its pages my attention was immediately drawn to two photographs of an illuminated address presented to William Cole Stockley in 1886 by members of his Birmingham band, known as 'Mr. Stockley's Band', "an ancestor of the later CBSO". This illuminated address bears a striking similarity to the examples shown on pages 3, 6 and 7. I looked for any information about the illustrator and found in small print at the foot of one page the name, '*E. Morton Birm^m*'. This confirmed that Edward Morton was an illuminating artist, based in Birmingham, and was producing illuminated testimonials twenty-five years before the publication of J.H. Ernest While's book.

After further research, I was able to establish that Edward Morton was active from about 1880 up to the early years of the 20th century specialising in High Victorian luxury illuminated testimonials. The earliest example, for which I have been able to find a reference, dates from 1881 and the most recent example from 1912. He lived for many years at 17 Bennett's Hill, Birmingham, and specialised in creating illuminated manuscripts for presentation to leading industrialists and civic benefactors.

Edward Morton was highly regarded in this specialised field of art and he had a reputation for the fine quality of his work. How did he come to be associated with Ernest While's book and why did he agree to share the illustration work with Harry Foster Newey. From the little evidence I have been able to trace, it would seem that this was Ernest While's first and only attempt at publishing so it must have been an ambitious coup on his part to persuade Edward Morton to contribute to the book. Possibly, Edward Morton had in his mind that the publication of this book at such an auspicious time would get his name known nationally rather than just locally. This is a fascinating mystery but it is more than likely that these three gentlemen knew each other as friends and, in the case of Ernest While and Edward Morton, had business connections within Birmingham's printing industry. Harry Foster Newey was a noted artist in his own right and had also studied calligraphy as part of his art education at The Birmingham School of Art. So this is possibly another connection that encouraged the collaboration between these three men. From the evidence presented above, it is almost certain that the illuminated part of the text was undertaken by Edward Morton because of his expertise in this artform while the illustrations were done by Harry Foster Newey. The book must have sold tolerably well because it ran to a second edition. The book was published by Siegle Hill & Co. of London in 1911 and printed by the Shakespeare Press, Allday Ltd., a long-established Birmingham printing company which in 1911 had premises in Edmund Street, Birmingham.

Six examples of Edward Morton's illuminated manuscripts are illustrated on pages 9 and 10. I also found a reference to an illuminated scroll created by him in 1912 and presented to Charles Gabriel Beale (1843-1912), solicitor, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham (1900-1912) giving Alderman Beale the Honorary Freedom of the City of Birmingham.

² Bratby, R., "*FORWARD – 100 Years of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra*", (2019), London, Elliot & Thompson Ltd., pp.18-22.



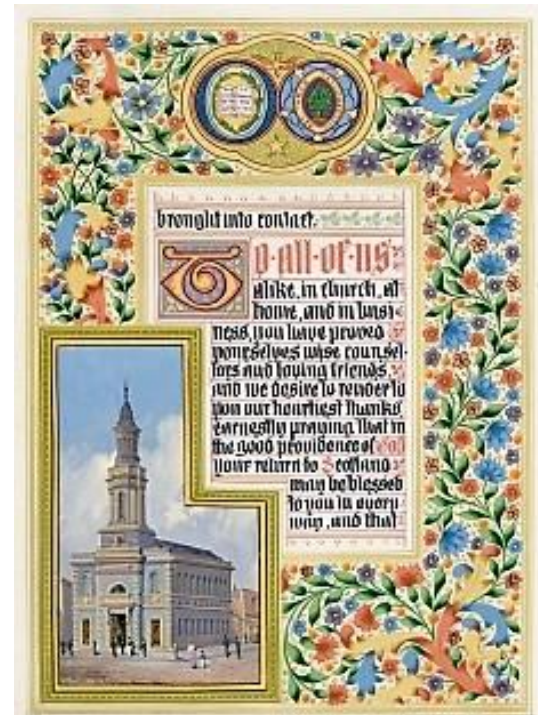
Address presented to Villiers Blakemore Esq., Hon. Sec. of The Birmingham Botanical & Horticultural Society 1881. Comprising 10 illuminated leaves.



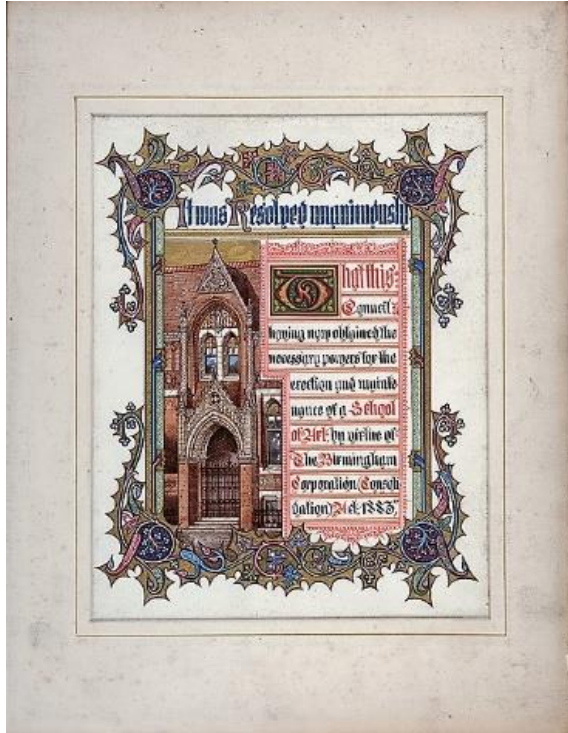
Part of the Address to William Stockley Cole from the members of his Birmingham band on his retirement in 1886.



"To Mr and Mrs James Byers on their leaving Birmingham for Annan. June 1892." An illuminated testimonial by Edward Morton.



Illuminated manuscript and vignette of Broad Street Presbyterian Church, Birmingham. Part of the testimonial to Mr and Mrs James Byers.



Part of an illuminated manuscript created by Edward Morton and presented on January 1, 1884, to The Birmingham School of Art by Birmingham Corporation as a means of thanking the School. Now exhibited at the School.



Illuminated address to William Cooke Esq., Mayor of the Borough of Birmingham, 1884. Artwork by Edward Morton of Birmingham.

What is an illuminated manuscript

An illuminated manuscript is a manuscript in which the text is supplemented with such decoration as initials, borders (marginalia) and miniature illustrations. In the strictest definition, the term refers only to manuscripts decorated with either gold or silver; but in both common usage and modern scholarship, the term refers to any decorated or illustrated manuscript from Western traditions. Comparable Far Eastern and Mesoamerican works are described as painted. Islamic manuscripts may be referred to as illuminated, illustrated or painted, though using essentially the same techniques as Western works.³

The influence of John Ruskin and William Morris on the creation of illuminated manuscripts

According to Evelyn Phimister⁴, in the early 1850s, while they were students at Oxford, William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones made frequent trips to the Bodleian Library to study the fine collection of manuscripts housed there, and they continued this habit when they moved to London in 1856. There, they visited the Manuscript Room at the British Museum, making sketches and notes of the manuscripts they had seen. It is likely that their enthusiasm was encouraged by John Ruskin's 1854 series of three lectures he gave to audiences of students and

³ Definition extracted from: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/illuminated_manuscript – accessed on 17.02.2020.

⁴ www.morrissociety.org/JWMS/14.1Autumn2000/AU00.14.1Phimister.pdf - accessed on 17.02.2020.

professional craftsmen at the Architectural Museum of London. Ruskin drew upon examples of ancient illuminated manuscripts to illustrate his principles of design.

Calligraphy was one of William Morris's many passions, and from 1870 to 1875, Morris's most prolific period in the production of illuminating pages of manuscript, he began no fewer than twenty-one manuscript books, many of which he also illuminated or planned to have decorated by Edward Burne-Jones and Charles Fairfax Murray with additional work by George Wardle. He was seeking to revive the art of the illuminated manuscript, which in European culture is mostly associated with the middle ages and, in particular, with sacred texts.

Part of Ruskin's legacy to Morris was that the illuminated manuscript remained a source of inspiration and design. Though he must have been aware that the demise of the art by the end of the sixteenth century was largely due to the triumph of printing, and that any modern attempt to revive it might be judged quixotic, he seems none the less to have had realistic motives⁵.

Morris founded the Kelmscott Press in 1892 through which in the course of the next four years he published some sixty fine-press editions culminating in the year of his death with the famous Kelmscott *Chaucer*, described by W.B. Yeats as 'the most beautiful of all printed books'. Ornament was to be an integral feature of Kelmscott Press books, and all the published works bear at least some form of decorated initials or borders, all designed by Morris⁶.

The Birmingham Arts and Crafts Culture in the late Victorian period

Although the production of Ernest While's book occurred in a later era, it is relevant to our story of this illuminated book to consider the period in Birmingham's history which nurtured this form of artwork and to try to understand the forces of human endeavour which encouraged it.

We are more likely to think of Birmingham as being historically an engineering centre, 'a city of a thousand trades' and to tend to forget that from the arrival of William Caslon the elder, and John Baskerville, Birmingham became *the* centre of European printing during the mid-18th century, and up until the mid-20th century was Britain's most historically important centre for printing outside London.⁷

Birmingham in the 19th century was also a major centre for music and art with its centrepiece, the Town Hall, which had opened in October 1834 in time to host Birmingham's Triennial Music Festival⁸. Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah* was triumphally premiered at the Festival in the Town hall under the composer's direction in 1846, as was Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* in 1900.

A Life Drawing Academy was established in Peck Lane, Birmingham, by Samuel Lines, Charles Barber and Joseph Vincent Barber in 1809. From this Life Drawing Academy, some members in 1814 formed the Birmingham Academy of Arts (BAA) 'for study and fellowship'. They took out a seven-year lease on rooms in Union Street. When this lease expired in 1821, the BAA were approached by ironmaster Archibald Kenrick, the banker Samuel Galton and the art collector Sir

⁵ www.victorianweb.org/authors/morris/wilmer.html, accessed on 17/02/2020.

⁶ Wildman, S. & Christian, J., "*EDWARD BURNE-JONES Victorian Artist-Dreamer*", (1998), New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, p.306.

⁷ Archer-Parré, C., "*Printing and the Printed Word*" included In Chapter 10 of "*BIRMINGHAM-The Workshop of the World*", Ed. by Chinn, C. & Dick, M., (2016), Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, pp.261-281.

⁸ Peers, A., "*Birmingham Town Hall-An Architectural History*", (2012), Farnham, Lund Humphries, p.113.

Robert Lawley to form 'a society for promoting the cultivation of the Fine Arts' for the benefit of local manufacturing. As a result, The Birmingham Society of Arts was founded and administered by a committee of 'gentlemen'.

The formation of the Birmingham Society of Arts in 1821, which was granted Royal patronage in 1868 to become the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (RBSA), was instrumental in encouraging the building of a municipal school of art and design in Margaret Street in 1877. This building was J.H. Chamberlain's last work before his sudden death in 1883 and, according to Andy Foster, probably his finest. The foundation stone was laid on May 31, 1884, and the school was opened in September 1885.

Edward Richard Taylor (1838-1912) was appointed headmaster of the School of Art in 1877 and this remarkable man introduced the unique concept of 'Art Laboratories' which provided practical training for male and female students in enamelling, metalwork, stained-glass design manufacture, embroidery, stone carving, fresco and jewellery that could be applied in a trade. He completely turned art instruction on its head on the basis that 'executed design' gave students the opportunity to construct the designs that they had created, so giving them tangible objects to show potential employers or commercial clients in the employment market. The result of this policy was that a number of women who had trained in executed design were able to take up highly paid jobs in industry or set up their own businesses. The popularity of this scheme was such that the Art Laboratory was later extended to accommodate the demand from male and female arts and crafts students.

The Birmingham School of Art became very involved in the teachings and practice of the Arts and Crafts movement including illuminating manuscripts. Artists such as Sir Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, and Ford Madox Brown became associated with the school as examiners of students' work, and they donated examples of their commissions for use in student classes and visited the school to meet with students⁹.

Nineteenth-century Birmingham came to be regarded as the most artistic town in England¹⁰ and in the late 19th century, Birmingham's adoption of George Dawson's Civic Gospel principles saw the municipalisation of the gas and water supplies which improved local services as well as the council's finances. These principles were in Dawson's words, 'A town is a solemn organism through which shall flow, and in which shall be shaped, all the highest, loftiest and truest ends of man's moral nature'. The town, initially under the civic leadership of Joseph Chamberlain, who was an avid supporter of Dawson's principles and a follower of Ruskin, provided a backdrop against which the arts and crafts culture flourished. Dawson, in particular, intended Birmingham to be more beautiful than Venice or Florence stressing the moral dimension deriving from the fact that in Birmingham culture was meant to be shared more equally with everybody, or in Dawson's words, 'Everything for Everybody'. As we have previously learnt, Harry Foster Newey attended George Dawson's boarding school in Kings Norton and it would be fascinating to know

⁹ Hoban, S., *"Art, Design & Architecture"*, included in Chapter 8 of *"BIRMINGHAM-The Workshop of the World"*, Ed. by Chinn, C. & Dick, M., (2016), Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, pp.215-237.

¹⁰ Fernie, Prof. E., "Beautiful Birmingham: Art and Welfare, contained in <https://everythingtoeverybody.bham.ac.uk/>, accessed 13/02/2020.

if Dawson's principles were implanted in Harry's imagination from an early age and encouraged him to attend the School of Art and Design to follow a career in art.

Meanwhile, the Free Library was rebuilt after a fire destroyed it and it reopened in June 1882. To add to the artistic element, the Municipal Art Gallery was built above new offices for the gas service and opened in 1885. The town also commenced its first municipal 'Improvement Scheme' by cutting Corporation Street in 1878 followed by John Bright Street in 1882. These development projects increased the status of architects and encouraged a renewed artistic optimism in the local townspeople. This was an age when self-improvement was all the rage and both men and women were drawn to the opportunities that both the Art Gallery and the School of Art and Design offered by studying all forms of art and crafts.

J.H. Ernest While, Harry Foster Newey and Edward Morton all had a part to play in this transformation of the Birmingham art scene which gained such an international reputation for excellence. It is comforting to know that two residents of Sutton Coldfield were associated with the artistic skills that were available to the printing industry in Birmingham.

While Road, Maney, Sutton Coldfield

When I first came across the author's name, J.H. Ernest While, I suspected that there might be a link between his surname and the naming of While Road in Maney, which sounds as if it was named after a person and not a place. My first instinct was to refer to a book, written by Kerry Osbourne¹¹, about the origin of road names within Sutton Coldfield. This states under the heading:

WHILE ROAD B72:

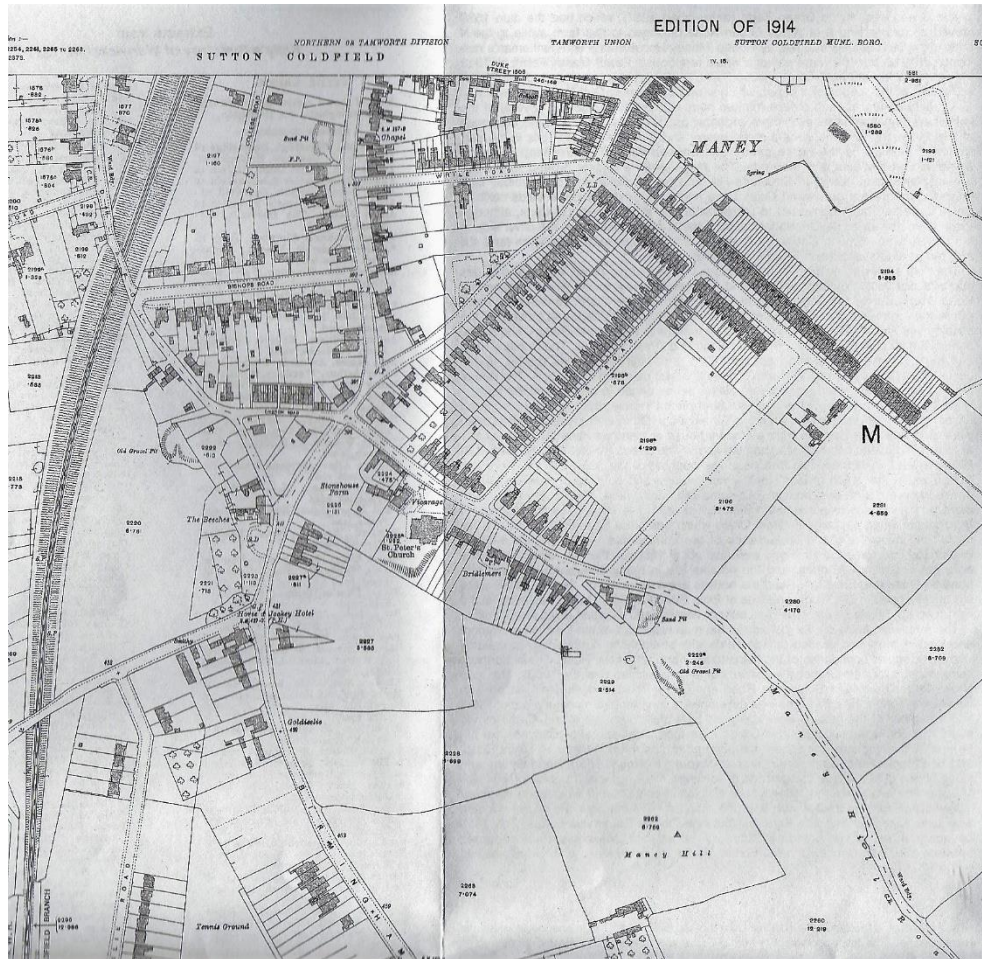
"George While, who lived at "The Elms" in Maney, was a prominent landowner in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His son, George Henry While, attended Bishop Vesey's Grammar School and went on to become a well-known local architect."

This source, which has no references, proved to be misleading because George While did not have a son named George Henry and his second son, who was named George Herbert While, while he had the correct initials was a brass founder in the family business for all of his working life. Also, the source has no details of the extent of George While's land ownings in Sutton Coldfield nor any details of associated land development.

It is likely that George While at some stage between c. 1875 and 1895 purchased land on the east side of the main road at Maney as an investment. The 1856 Parochial Valuation Map shows this as a strip of land (No. 1532) extending from the Birmingham Road to Holland Road with the rear of properties in Duke Street forming its northern boundary. Probably around 1900 he sold part or all of this land for cutting a new road (While Road) in order to build houses upon it. It is certain that the While family bought at least two of the initial batch of houses that were built in what was to be called While Road.

¹¹ Osbourne, K., *"The Street Names of Sutton Coldfield"*, Privately published, Sutton Coldfield, Sadler House, - Item: WHILE ROAD B72. - Sutton Coldfield Reference. Library - BCOL 914.42496 OSB.

Studying the street map on page 14, one can see partial building development on the north side of the road. Typically, these would have been built for the new lower middle-class who for the most part were employed in industry and finance and demanded more distinguished housing in order to reflect their progress up the social ladder. The façades of these houses would have reflected the changes created by the 1894 Building Act which allowed window casements to be extended outwards rather than be recessed. On the north side of the road there is near the western end a fine terrace of three houses with their fronts embellished with terracotta bricks.



1914 O.S. Map of the Maney area of Sutton Coldfield. At the centre top of the map While Road runs west to east from Birmingham Road to Holland Road. Fourteen semi-detached houses were built on the north side of the road and just six on the south side

Prior to the First World War, there was as yet little new housing development along the Walmley side of Birmingham Road from Maney to Wylde Green which was still agricultural land. Most of this in the vicinity of Maney was part of Lower Maney Farm that stood in Maney Hill Road, while there was agricultural land towards Boldmere and Wylde Green that formed part of the adjacent Wylde Green Farm in Wylde Green Road. Most of the recent housing development had already taken place in the vicinity of Wylde Green railway station as land from this farm had

previously been sold for new roads and houses following the arrival of the London & North Western Railway's Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield line in 1862.

George Hunt While, A.R.I.B.A. – Architect

Failing initially to find a link to a George While, the architect, I persevered with my search and discovered a reference to a George While in Andy Foster's Pevsner Architectural Guide to Birmingham¹² and on further investigation I discovered that George H. While was responsible for designing some fine churches, including St. John at Longbridge (1956-7) and St. Boniface at Quinton (1958-9). He was a partner in the Birmingham architectural practice of Bromilow, While and Smeaton that specialised in church architecture. However, at this stage of my researches I had not established the precise identity of this well-known architect within the While family in Sutton Coldfield.

By a strange set of coincidences, I chanced to meet in a local supermarket an acquaintance whom I have known for many years. We got into conversation about our general wellbeing and I mentioned that I was currently researching the While family in Sutton Coldfield and their connection with While Road. She enquired, "Was that George While", and after my confirmation she added that her parents had been great friends of George While and his wife. "He was an architect", she pronounced. When I further questioned her, she added without hesitation that he was a partner of Bromilow, While and Smeaton and that he and his wife had lived in Mulroy Road. This acquaintance of mine is a lady in her 80s, so she was referring to a time in the post-war period, probably pre-1950s.

Enthused by my acquaintance's information, I delved deeper into the genealogy of the While family and discovered from the 1939 England and Wales Register that there was a George Hunt While, then aged 29, who was married to Elsie, and they were living with his parents, George Herbert While and Lydia Kathleen While at 10 Mulroy Road, Sutton Coldfield. His occupation was given as 'Architect'.

So the mystery of George H. While was solved. The 'H' of his second name stood for Hunt and not Henry and therefore he was not the son of George While of "The Elms" in Maney but was his grandson and also a nephew of J.H. Ernest While, the author of the illuminated book.

In January 1936, George Hunt While married Elsie Kidson from Stockport, who was born on June 13, 1911. Kelly's Directory of Birmingham for 1936 lists George Hunt While, A.R.I.B.A., as an architect working at offices in 22 Temple Row, Birmingham 2. George and his wife lived with his parents in Mulroy Road, Sutton Coldfield but from time to time they were registered at other addresses in the West Midlands, probably due to the nature of his work. For instance, Kelly's 1940 Directory gives his address as "Newstead", 5 New Road, Water Orton, Birmingham. On the same page are listed his father, George Herbert While, living at 10 Mulroy Road, Sutton Coldfield, as well as his sisters, 'The Misses While' (presumably his father's twin sisters, Millicent and Ethel), living at 9 Wyvern Road, Sutton Coldfield. George Hunt While A.R.I.B.A., died on May 7, 1980,

¹² Foster, A., Pevsner Architectural Guides - "*Birmingham*", (2005), London, Yale University Press, p.33n.

and his address was given as Gaialands Crescent, Lichfield, which is in the vicinity of the Cathedral. Probate was granted on June 24, 1980, and his estate valued at £51,766.

The While Family

Thomas and John While

The task of researching the While family in order to locate details of both J.H. Ernest While and George Hunt While led me to look in some detail at this prominent local family. Like most families, the While family had many branches but I have only selected those individuals that had a bearing on this account of the Coronation souvenir book. Of the five sons and two daughters born to John and Annette While, this article only concentrates on John While and two of his sons, George and Henry Charles While. All three had lived in Sutton Coldfield and were successful businessmen.

The While family in the 19th and early 20th centuries were brass and German silver¹³ founders and their business was located in Nechells, Aston, an area which attracted this industry at that time. The business was probably started by John While, whose father, Thomas While, was also a brass founder.

John While was born on September 21, 1807, possibly in the Southwark district of London, to Thomas and Elizabeth While of Blackfriars Road, London, so at some time John moved from



Classical-styled terraced housing in Great Brook Street, Duddeston, begun in c.1788, showing that this area of Aston was once quite affluent. (Photo by Phylis Nicklin, 1954)

Middlesex to Duddeston and Nechells in Aston during the early 19th century to join the lucrative brass founding industry that was developing within the town of Birmingham.

On September 18, 1831, John While married Annette Woodward at St. Mary's Church, Handsworth. There is a record that Annette was baptised at St. Philip's Church, Birmingham, on June 30, 1808, following her birth on March 6 of that same year. Her parents were John and

¹³ **German silver** was a name for an alloy of copper, nickel and zinc, which did not contain silver but looked like silver. First used in China during the Qing dynasty, a manufacturing process was developed in Germany where it was known as *Alpacca*. The German process of manufacture was introduced into England in 1830, but in 1832, a form of German silver was developed in Birmingham by Charles Askins. The development of electroplating caused nickel silver to become widely used. Early in the 20th century, German silver was used in the automobile industry before the advent of sheet metal.

Susanna Woodward. After their marriage, John and Annette lived in the Nechells Green area of Aston.

The 1841 England Census shows that they were living in the Aston hamlet of Duddeston and Nechells, which paints a picture of this area towards the middle of the 19th century in a somewhat pastoral setting. At one time this area would have been quite affluent with a burgeoning brass founding industry in its midst. Both John's and Annette's ages were given as 30 and John's profession was registered as a brass founder. They were living in Johnson Street, a small side street positioned between Nechells Park Road and Mount Street, just north of the present gas works. Their family comprised Thomas 8, Emma 5, and John who was just eleven months old. Interestingly, John While senior was not baptised until June 5, 1843, when he was 35 years of age, the ceremony taking place at St. Philip's Church in Colmore Row, Birmingham.

By the time of the 1851 England Census, John and Annette had moved around the corner into Mount Street, Nechells, and their family had increased from three to seven members with the addition of four children comprising George While 7, William Herbert While 6, Henry Charles While 3, and Annette Susannah While 1. The professions of both John While and his eldest son Thomas, who by now was 18, were given as brass and German silver casters which would accord with the introduction of the production of electro-plated nickel steel (EPNS) ware in Birmingham by 1844.

They moved from Nechells to Wylde Green probably about the time that the London & North Western Railway's line from Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield was opened in 1862, and subsequently they moved to "The Elms" which was located on the main street (now Birmingham Road) in the hamlet of Maney. Housing here was centred on both sides of the road near to what we now refer to as Maney Corner.

Twenty years on, in 1871, the young While family had vacated the family nest and John and Annette While, now both aged 60, were still resident in Maney where they lived alone with a young domestic servant. Two doors away at "The Laurels" lived George and Sarah Anne Carter While, now aged 27 and 26 respectively. The professions of both John, the father, and George, the son, were given as brass founders.

John's wife Annette died sometime between 1871 and 1881 because the 1881 England Census records John as a widower living at the same address in Maney but now with two domestic servants. John While continued to live at "The Elms" in Maney until his death on July 4, 1884.

George While and his younger brother Henry Charles While

By the time of the England Census of 1881, George While, now aged 37, was also a widower and living at "The Laurels" in Maney with his seven young children and three domestic servants. The later England Census of 1901 records that George was still resident at "The Elms" living with six of his seven children, his younger son George Henry While having by this time married and left to live at "Fairbourne" in While Road.

The Whiles were obviously successful businessmen and invested in land and property. The area of land on which While Road was built was opposite properties the Whiles owned in Maney, namely "The Elms" and "The Laurels".

Of their seven children, George While, who was J.H. Ernest While's father, was born on April 29, 1843, in Nechells, Birmingham. George, like his father, also became a brass founder and at the age of 27 married Sarah Ann Carter in the autumn of 1869. They soon moved from Nechells to a house on the main road in Maney, Sutton Coldfield. We now call this road Birmingham Road but in the 1870s it did not have an official name and was referred to as, simply, the main road.

A younger son, Henry Charles While, was born in 1847 at Nechells. At the age of 13 he was sent away to a boarding school in Castle Bromwich. Unlike his two older brothers, Henry opted to work in the brewing industry and became a maltster with Coates whose business was located in Mott Street, Birmingham, a street which still exists, located between Great Hampton Row and Hampton Street, parallel to Constitution Hill. He married the boss's daughter, Ellen Coates, both aged 20, on September 29, 1862, at the Aston Parish Church of St. Peter and St. Paul's. Their residence was given as Erdington. In Kelly's Directory of Warwickshire of 1872 the business was described as Coates and While, maltsters, Mott Street, Birmingham. So by marrying the boss's daughter, Henry Charles became a partner in the Birmingham firm of maltsters and appeared to have become financially successful. He is referred to in the 1911 England Census as a Retired Brewer. He lived at "The Laurels" in Maney, Sutton Coldfield until his death on October 25, 1916.

George While died on November 18, 1907, aged 64, at "The Elms" in Maney. Probate was granted at Birmingham on February 7, 1908, to John Henry Ernest While, printer, George Herbert While, brass founder, and Henry Charles While, gentleman, who had by now moved into his grandfather's old house "The Laurels" in Maney. The effects of George's estate were worth £3,935. 10s. 5d.; the resworn value was £4,065. 14s. 1d.

George Herbert While

J.H. Ernest While's younger brother, George Herbert While, was the second son of George and Sarah Ann While and was born in December 1873. The 1901 England Census records that he was living at "Fairbourne" in While Road with his wife Lydia Kathleen While (née Haines), their young daughter, Beatrice, and a two-month old son, Howard Haines While. George Herbert was a partner in the family's brass founding business. The 1911 England Census records a George Herbert While, aged 37, brass founder, still living at "Fairbourne", While Road, with his wife Lydia Kathleen While, aged 35, but by now they had three children, Howard Haines While 10, Hilda Carter While 9, and George Hunt While 7 months. So daughter Beatrice would have appeared to have died in the previous decade.

From the Sutton Coldfield Registers of Electors it is possible to trace their movements in the years following 1911. By 1918, George Herbert While and his family had relocated to "The Croft" in Mulroy Road, Trinity Ward, a new road and the start of a new residential development. His brother J.H. Ernest While had moved from Coleshill Road into George Herbert's previous home, "Fairbourne" in While Road. They were still living at this same address in 1935.

George Herbert While died on September 26, 1945, aged 72, in Sutton Coldfield.

This article is evidence of the how local history research can lead one down unexpected paths. What started out as a simple overview of the publication of an illuminated book with details of the lives of its author and its illustrators expanded to include a brief overview of the arts scene in Birmingham in the late 19th century, as well as a look at the local While family, who are of interest from a local history point of view, because they were typical members of the lower middle class of entrepreneurs who moved to Sutton Coldfield from the Birmingham area in the middle of the 19th century to enjoy improved living conditions. They became property owners and their wealth creation helped to shape the future direction of Sutton Coldfield from a sleepy market town into a much larger dormitory town. In the 1870s they chose to live in the quiet hamlet of Maney.

Readers might well be intrigued to learn that in 1772 the Rector of Sutton Coldfield, the Rev. R.B. Riland, addressing a description of the parish to his Diocesan, the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, describes Maney, along with Hill, Little Sutton, Walmley and Wigginsill as hamlets.

From researches¹⁴ previously carried out by the author concerning the Birmingham to Lichfield and Birmingham to Tamworth Turnpikes in the early 1800s, we know that the Birmingham to Lichfield road via Sutton Coldfield was, in places “little better than a poorly maintained narrow country lane” and Riland Bedford states that at this time there existed no direct and traversable road to either Birmingham or Lichfield. The main road through the hamlet of Maney would have been little better than a country lane. Prior to 1807, when the first Act of Parliament for a turnpike road from Watford Gap to Birmingham was passed, W.K. Riland Bedford describes the miserable state of the narrow lane leading from Sutton Coldfield via Maney to Birmingham¹⁵, thus:

“...no direct and well contrived communication existed either with Lichfield or Birmingham. On the south side the crooked road led down to Skinner’s Pools, and up a steep incline by the Cup Inn, and the stone house at Maney, to the edge of the Coldfield along which it straggled by Wild Green to a narrow lane leading across the Chester Road towards Erdington. On the north side a tortuous and narrow road led to Mere Pool, and thence up to the village of Hill to the common which occupied the slope towards Lichfield”.

Apart from regular stagecoach traffic passing through the town, which declined as railway mania took over, the regular traffic on this road was almost certainly of an agricultural nature or the post-chaises owned or hired by the upper-class town residents.

The coming of the LNWR railway line in 1862, from Birmingham to Sutton Coldfield via Duddeston and Aston, drastically altered the residential status of the town so that it became attractive to the entrepreneurial middle classes. The industrial growth of Birmingham saw a reciprocal increase in the population of the town so that a lack of suitable housing became a social problem. The town was forced to expand to overcome this demand for housing.

¹⁴ Billingham, R., “The Last Surviving Tollhouse in Birmingham?”, contained in *The Birmingham Historian*, Issue 25, Winter 2003, pp. 23-27. Also available on this website, Vol. 7, Summer 2004, Article 3, of Proceedings.

¹⁵ Riland Bedford, W.K., “History of Sutton Coldfield”, (1891), privately published, printed in Birmingham, p. 38.

The While families at sometime around 1870 chose to move from Duddeston to live in Sutton Coldfield, probably because the town was expanding and was fast becoming a desirable residential area with good transport connections and local amenities. It was also still essentially a rustic town in style, reasonably healthy for the time, even though it stood on the north-eastern side of the West Midlands Conurbation and was a hostage to fortune to the prevailing south-westerly winds, which in the 19th century and into the greater part of the 20th century, blew the contaminated industrial fumes from Birmingham and the Black Country right across our town. I can remember in 1957 during my National Service days, and before the introduction of smokeless zones, flying from RAF Little Rissington in Gloucestershire to RAF Shawbury in Shropshire and seeing on our eastern flank the yellow pall of polluted atmosphere that hung above the extensive West Midlands Conurbation. It was a sight that still remains in my visual memory.

By contrast, the Newey family, father and son, were an established family in the Birmingham area but later moved about, first to rural Warwickshire, then to Sutton Coldfield. Harry Foster Newey's domestic movements also took him to The Potteries for a decade but he then moved southwards to Sutton Coldfield, possibly to live near to both his and his wife's parents. Apart from his move to Staffordshire, Harry had tended to live near to his parents.

When J.H. Ernest While's book was published in 1911, the leading arts and science group in Sutton Coldfield, the Vesey Club¹⁶, had been in existence for twenty-three years and, in terms of membership, was approaching its peak before it was to be affected by the shortage of new members following the outbreak of the First World War. From 1918 it found difficulty in recruiting additional members. Attrition exceeded new members until it eventually ceased to exist in the early 1930s.

However, prior to all this, peoples' attitudes to their expectations were changing at a pace. The class divisions which used to be more stringent in Victorian society were breaking down and the Feminist Movement in the UK picked up momentum in the Edwardian period. Even the Vesey Club relaxed its rules by allowing women to become members and subsequently voting members.

In the preceding Edwardian period, roughly 1900 to 1910, it was the lower middle-class who developed the most. So it is interesting to learn how three local men were applying their thoughts and professional skills at this period in time.

Roy Billingham, February 2020.

¹⁶ **The Vesey Club:** For a detailed account of the history of the Vesey Club, refer to the appropriate section of my account, "Two Remarkable Tenants of Midland Lodge" available on this website.