

**(Including: The Osbourne Family and  
The Mysterious Cleone de Hevinham Benest (aka Miss Griff))**

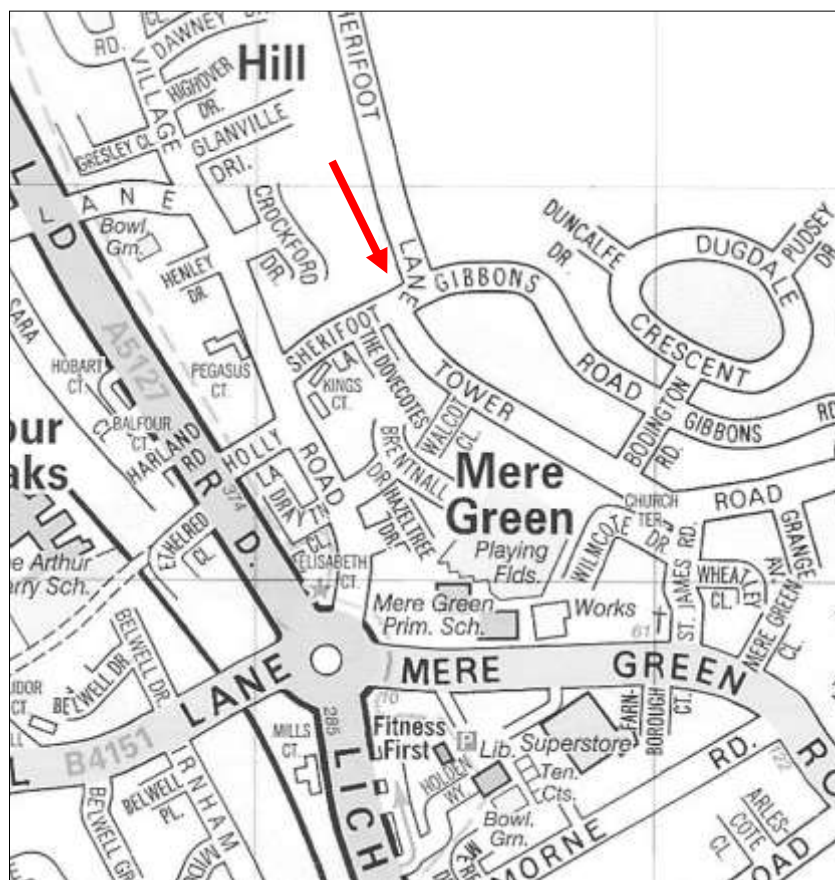
When travelling in the countryside, or even in some of our older towns, one frequently comes across a road that takes a sudden curve, zig-zag or right angled bend. This could well be the result of our ancestors using the by-ways as they meandered around the edges of ancient fields. You might even witness this in the street where you live.

[illegible]

1

One could believe that a squatter, perhaps in the 1700s, found this particular spot a very convenient place to set up his dwelling, accessible to the local village of Hill which was well established at this time. It was also within easy distance of possible work in the surrounding fields to support him or his family.

This AZ map shows the bend where, nowadays, Sherifoot Lane is joined by Tower Road and Gibbons Road.<sup>2</sup>



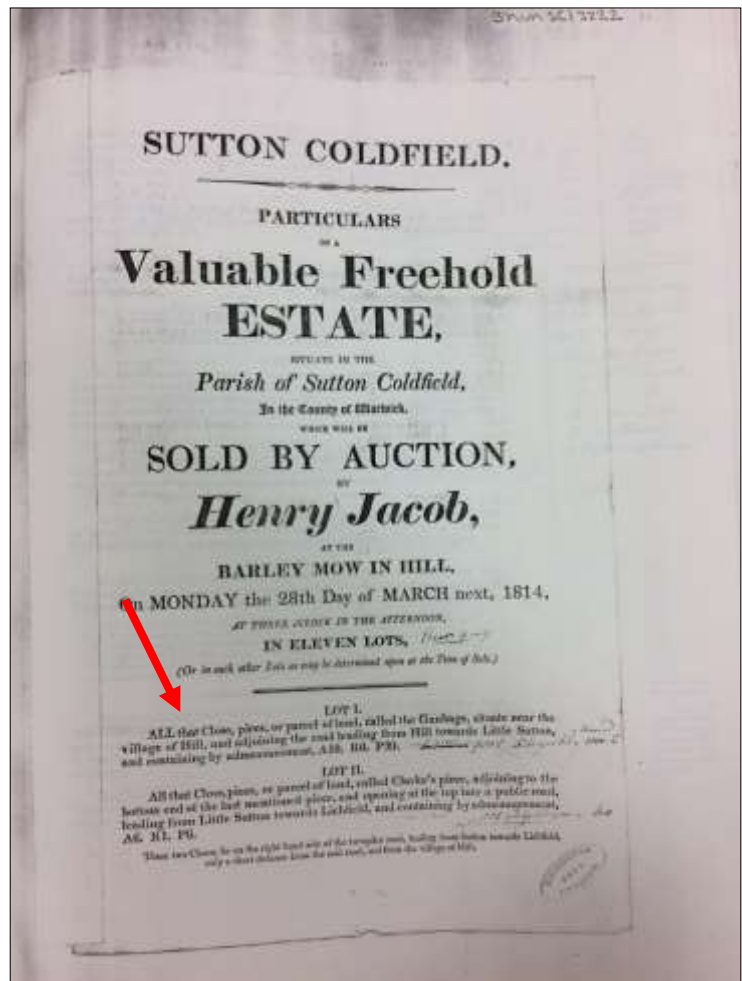
Right-angle bend in Sherifoot Lane  
(AZ Street Atlas, West Midlands/Birmingham, Edition 5, 2015. p43)

What records show of this area, is that there was a field (A10. R0. P39.) called *The Gaubage* just south of this right angle bend and to the east of what is now Tower Road. The following drawing uses field details from the Enclosure and Corn Rent Map of 1821 and shows *The Gaubage* (sometimes referred to as *the Ganbage* or *Gabelage*), which would formerly have been part of Sherralls Field. The subject of this article is an unnamed piece of land which, it



Agnes Bracken, the well known Sutton historian of the mid 1800s, speculated that this word was derived from *gabelage, toll or glebe land for the monastery at Canwell*<sup>4</sup>, and other records show that at one time Hill Village and Little Sutton "*antiently belong'd to the Little Priorie of Canwell*"<sup>5</sup>

It would appear, therefore, that whoever used this land paid rent to Canwell Priory. After the dissolution of the monasteries, much of Canwell's property passed to St George's Chapel, Windsor. Later, John Veysey, Bishop of Exeter was known to own it at his death in 1554.<sup>6</sup>



Auction Particulars 28th March, 1814

(Sutton Coldfield Sales Catalogue 1790-1892 (Sutton Coldfield Library Ref: QSH58.9)

The piece of land in question first appears on some auction particulars<sup>7</sup> at the sale of Mr Henry Curzon's land on 28th March 1814 where it formed part of *The Ganbage*. At the auction it was described as:-

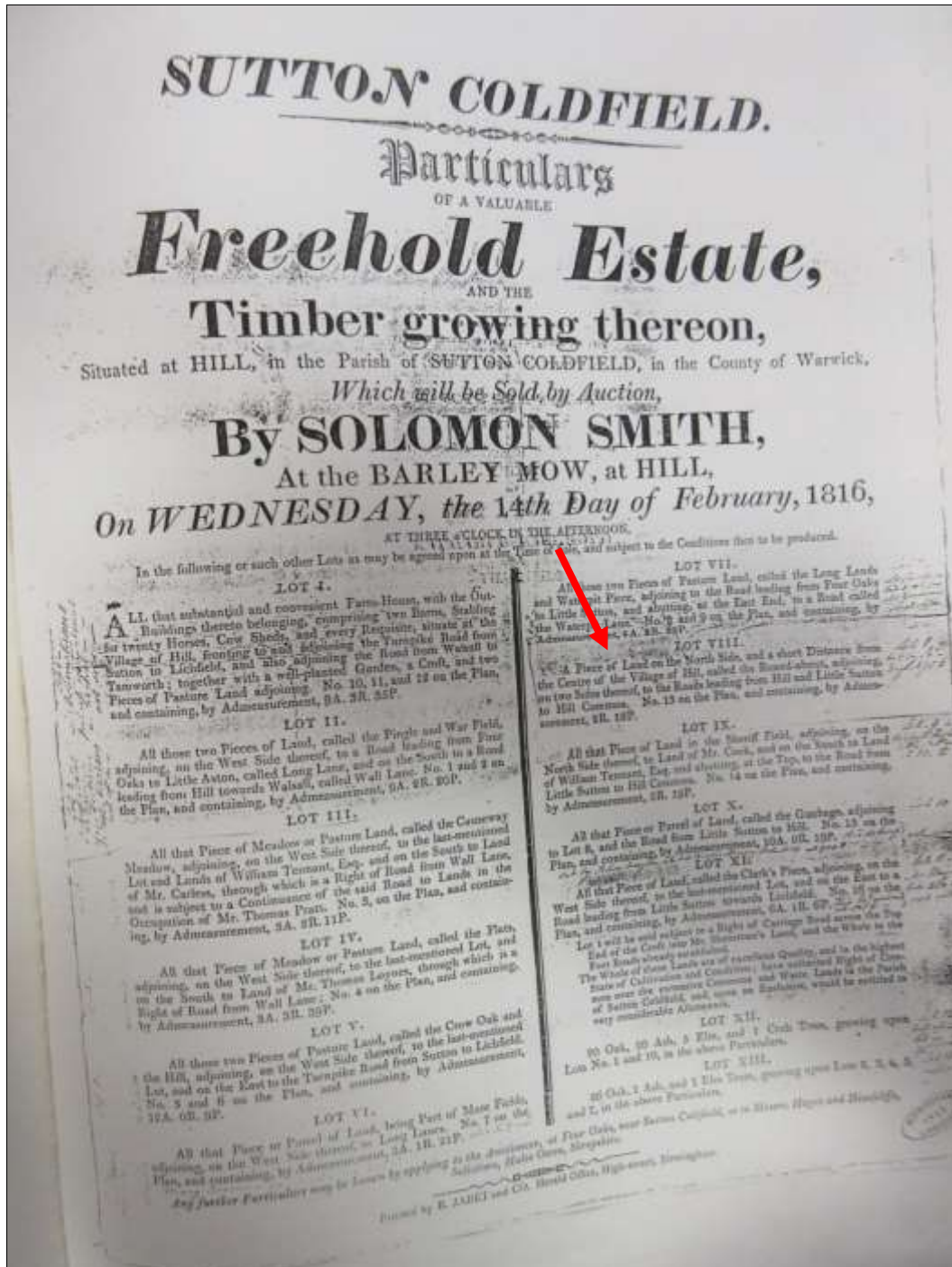
*LOT I - ALL that Close, piece, or parcel of land, called the Ganbage, situate near the village of Hill, and adjoining the road leading from Hill towards Little Sutton, and containing by admeasurement, A10.R0.P39.*

At this time, the asking price seems to have been £900, but it was not sold at this time.

The next auction was on 14th February 1816 and the small plot appears to be for sale as a separate item on the auction particulars<sup>8</sup>, this time being referred to as:-



LOT VIII.: A Piece of Land on the North Side, and a short Distance from the Centre of the Village of Hill, called **the Round-about**, adjoining on two Sides thereof, to the Roads leading from Hill and Little Sutton to Hill Common. No. 13 on the Plan, and containing, by admeasurement, 2R. 18P.



Auction Particulars 14th February 1816  
(Sutton Coldfield Sales Catalogue 1790-1892 (Sutton Coldfield Library Ref: QSH 58.9))



On those same particulars, the Surveyor's plan does give the impression that the *Round-about* could easily be circumnavigated or, perhaps, its name referred to a place that passers by would be forced to take a round about route!



Close up view of the Surveyor's plan of 1816, showing 'the Round-about'  
(Sutton Coldfield Sales Catalogue 1790-1892 (Sutton Coldfield Library Ref: QSH 58.9))

This little plot was snapped up for £75 by Joseph Day. He was the father of Phebe Day (b:1795 d:21.06.1841) who, on 25 December 1815, married Edward Rittle (b:06.08.1786, buried 09.06.1836).<sup>9</sup> It seems likely that Joseph bought the land for the newly weds. This must have been the time that one or maybe more cottages were built on *the Round-about*. Later maps suggest that there were more than one. Cottages shown in this picture from nearby Hill Village Road give some idea of how they may have looked.<sup>10</sup>



Cottages in Hill Village Road(demolished 1956)  
(LEA, Roger, 'History Spot', Hill [42], [www.sclhrg.org.uk](http://www.sclhrg.org.uk))



Around 1824, the Corn Rent Schedule <sup>11</sup> shows Phebe's husband, Edward Writtle, to be the owner and occupier of a House and Garden on this site at Hill, known as Plot 266.1. He was also the owner of the other part of the land, Plot 266.2, his tenant being John Standley, also with a House and Garden.

Edward, unfortunately, died, aged 52, in **1836**, leaving Phoebe with 4 children, namely: <sup>12</sup>

Susannah	(b: 1816, d.1851)
Harriet Rittle	(b:26.07.1818, d:1880)
William Writtle	(b: 15.07.1820, D:1891)
Elizabeth	(b:30.03.1823, d:16.09.1869)



Plot 266.1/266.2, Corn Rent Schedule 1824  
(Corn Rent Schedule, Sutton Coldfield Library)

The Census of 1841 shows Phoebe Wrottle (sic) (d.21.06.1841) living with children William, Harriet and Susannah (now married to ? Field, with baby Edwin, 4 and Frances, 1) at Hill.<sup>13</sup>

The Parochial Valuation of **1857**<sup>14</sup>, clearly states that by now Joseph Short was the owner of the complete site (Plot 3021). Occupying the larger portion (2r. 14p.), which comprised at least one House and Garden with a lean to and pigsty, was Allen Gilbert. The smaller portion (4p.) was lived in by Ann Welch (formerly occupied by a Mrs Allock - or, possibly, Allcott)



Plot 3021  
(1857 Parochial Valuation, Sutton Coldfield Library)

Tracing a complete list of owners and occupiers of one or more of the cottages on this site has proved indecisive, as there are no detailed addresses for Hill in the Censuses of 1861, 1871, 1881 and 1891. One family that probably inhabited the smaller cottage for many years were the Allcotts, but the ultimate and most enduring family to live on the site were the Osbornes.<sup>15</sup>





1861-1901 - Difficult to confirm owners of site.  
*(OS Map, 1st Edition approx 1880, Sutton Coldfield Library)*

## The Osbourne Family

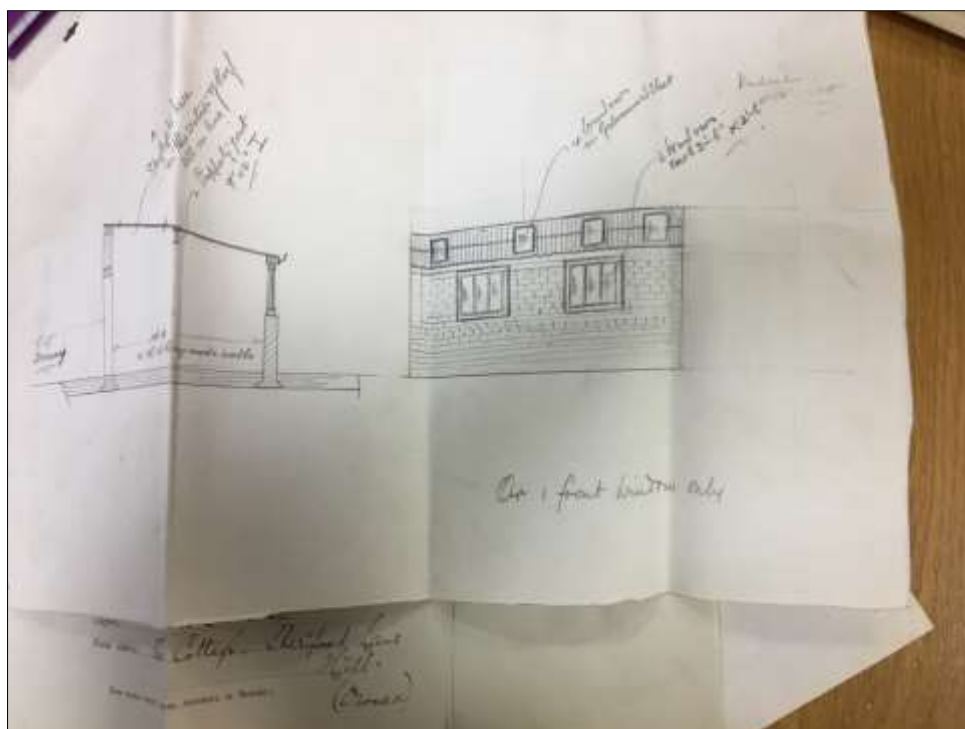
Fred Osborne was born at Bellfields Farm, Brewood in Staffordshire in 1880. His father, Henry, died in 1882 and his mother, Frances, married Charles Price in 1885. So, at 21 years of age in 1891, he was living with a new stepfather in Dudley. It appears Fred then got married but, moving to Sutton Coldfield, the 1911 Census records him as a 31 year old widower, a Manufacturer's Agent for Cycle Accessories and living as a boarder with George and Sarah Ann Stanton at *The Cottage, Back Lane* (i.e. Tower Road), *Hill*. It is interesting to note that the address is also sometimes recorded as being in Shereford Lane, Four Oaks, or Sirfoot Lane, Hill.<sup>16</sup>



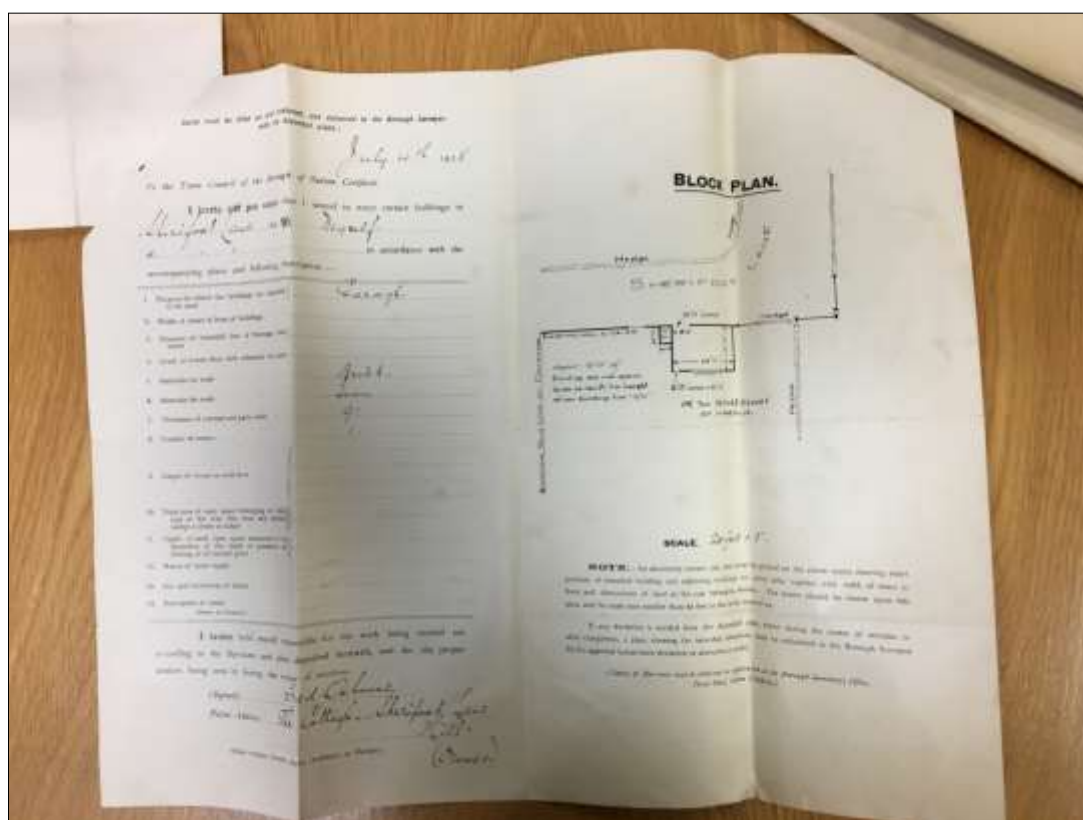
Church Lane (sometimes Back Lane, later Tower Road) approx 1902  
(OS Map, 2nd Edition, Sutton Coldfield Library)

One wonders if Fred now went off to fight in WWI (1914-1918) , although no records of service have been found.

By 1918, seemingly now the owner of *The Cottage*, he had a garage/motor house built for himself (with a toilet attached) adjacent to *The Cottage* and close to the edge of Sherfoot Lane (Planning Application 2780)<sup>17</sup>. One wonders if he used this as a workshop for a cycle business, as it does not seem designed to take a motor car.



Part of Planning Application 2780 (showing garage) - July 1918  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)



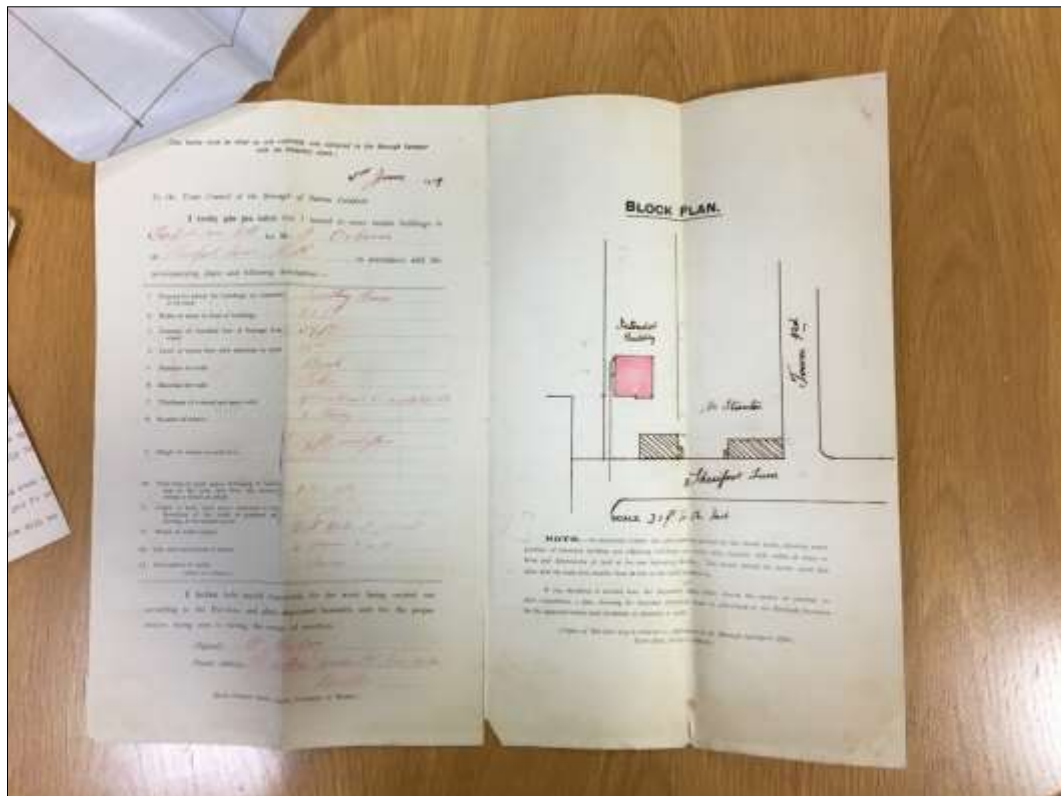
Part of Planning Application 2780 (showing the Block Plan) - July 1918  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)



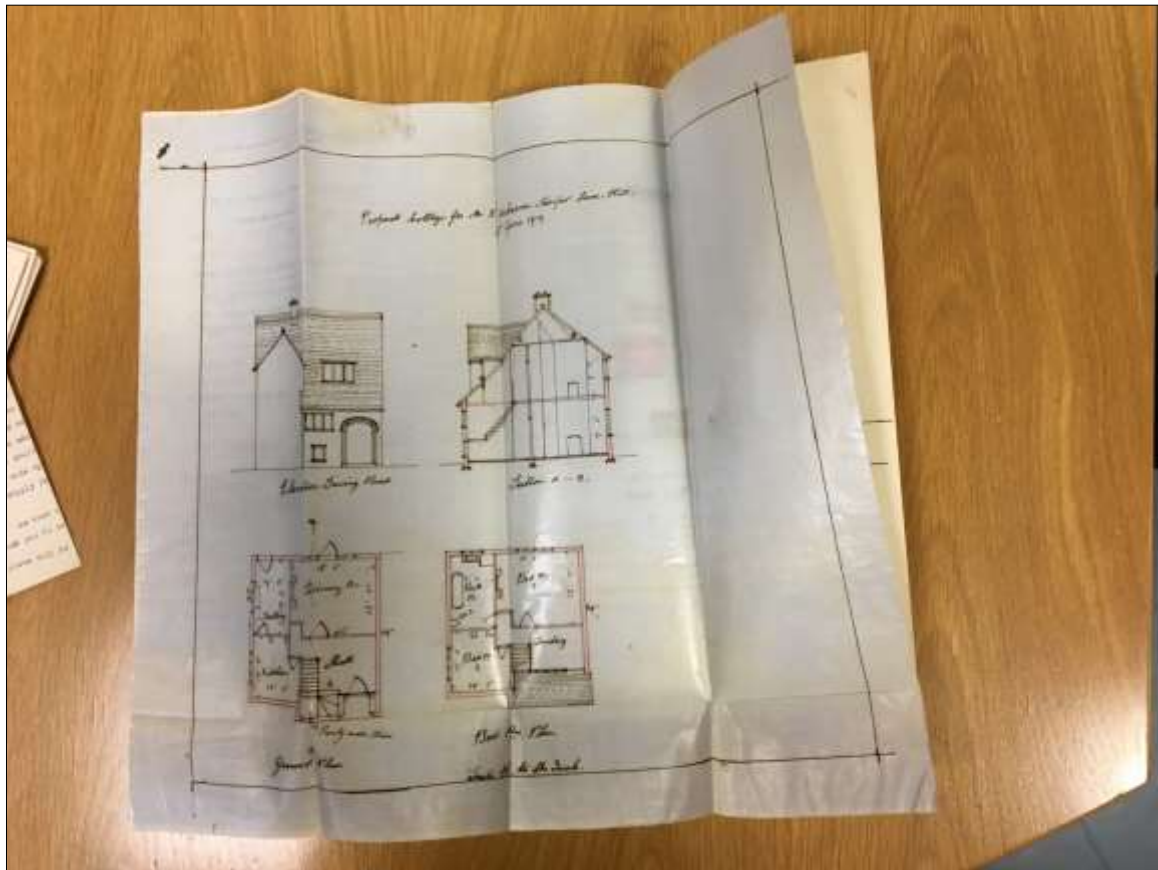
In 1919, he married Nina Louise Wright from Evesham<sup>18</sup> and a beautiful Arts & Crafts house (Planning Application 2827)<sup>19</sup> was built for them immediately behind the garage. He called it *The Pines*, presumably after the pine trees that grew beside the road outside his front garden.



The Pine Trees in 2019  
(Author's photo 2019)

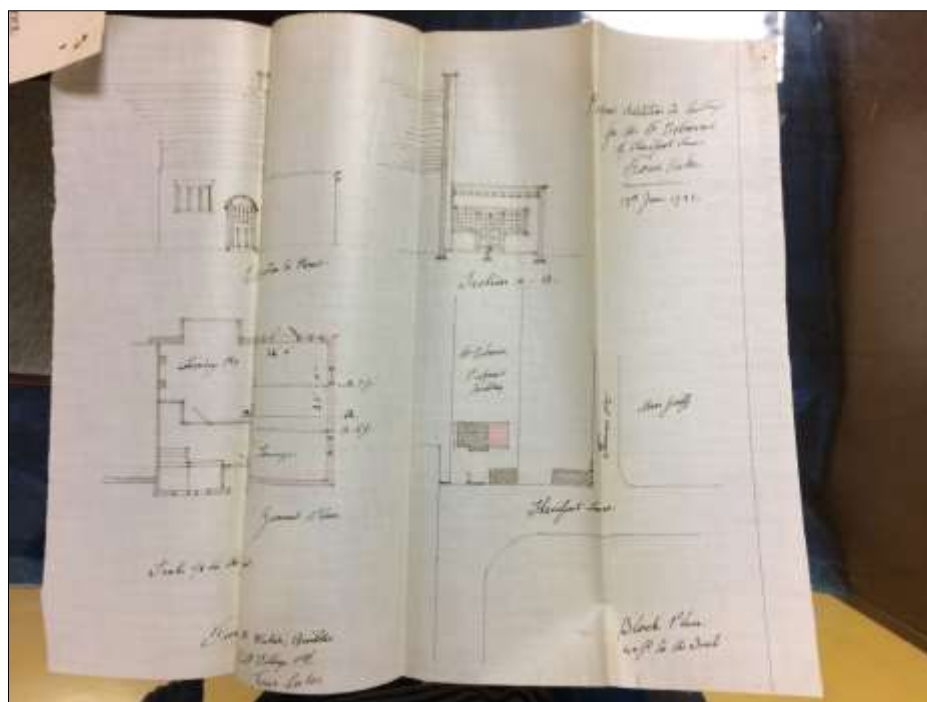


Planning Application 2827 (showing Block Plan) - June 1919  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)

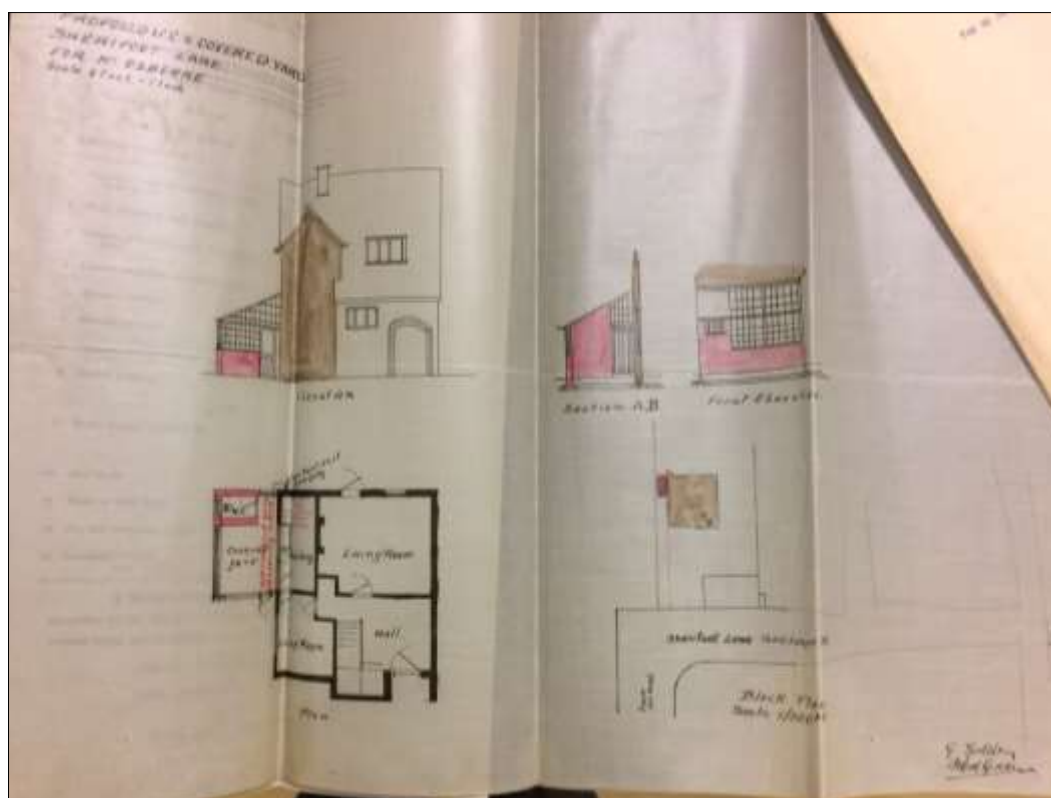


Planning Application 2827 (showing house) - June 1919  
*(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)*

Over the next three years, perhaps with a family in mind, he put in an application for an extension to his house, which appears to have been rejected (Planning Application 3194), but he seems to have succeeded with an application for a covered yard incorporating a downstairs lavatory (Planning Applications 3610).<sup>20</sup>



Planning Application 3194 - January 1922 (rejected?)  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)



Planning Application 3610 - November 1923  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)

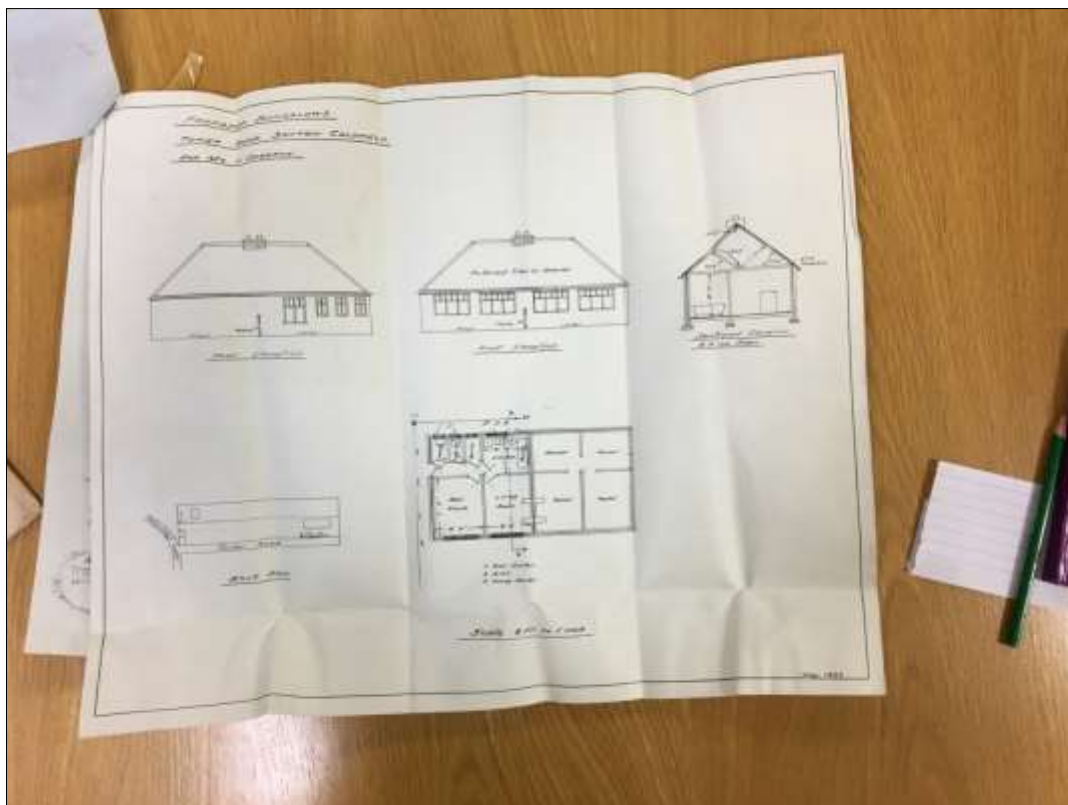


The children subsequently arrived, being Ian (b.10.04.1920) and Ruth (b.11.03.1924).<sup>21</sup>

It was around this time that a remarkable lady known as Cleone de Hevenham Benest (aka Miss Griff) moved into her new house on the opposite corner of Tower Road/Sherifoot Lane. For a woman, she had a most exceptional skill but her activities during the short time she lived in Four Oaks have never been fully discovered - more about her later. (See Fred Osbourne's Planning Application 3194 in January 1922, where her name appears).<sup>22</sup>

In 1926 the Electoral Register<sup>23</sup> shows Fred and Nina to be at No. 7 Sherifoot Lane for some reason. However, back at *The Pines*, now numbered 28 Sherifoot Lane in 1931, they continued to live a quiet life. One wonders if the yet to be published 1921 Census will show him to have become a Managing Director of a firm dealing in cycles. He certainly seems now to be financially able to indulge an interest in the property market.

Not having to look far for a piece of land, he was able to have two very small semi-detached bungalows built at the rear of *The Cottage* in Tower Road (Planning Application 6306) in 1933<sup>24</sup> both of which are still there. It will be noticed from the plan that the right angled bend of Sherifoot Lane is now beginning to look like a curve.

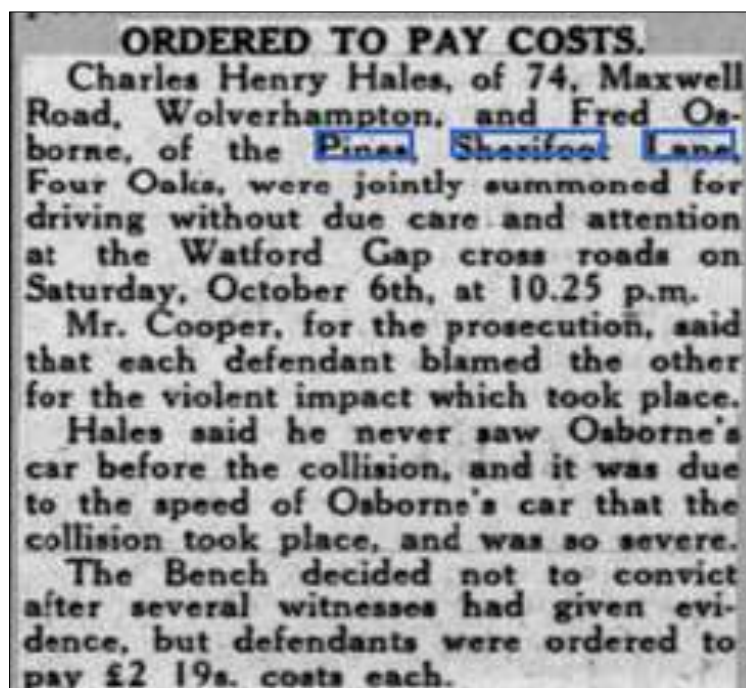


Planning Application 6306  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)



The Two Bungalows built at rear of The Cottage  
 (OS. 4th Edition, approx 1930s, Sutton Coldfield Library)

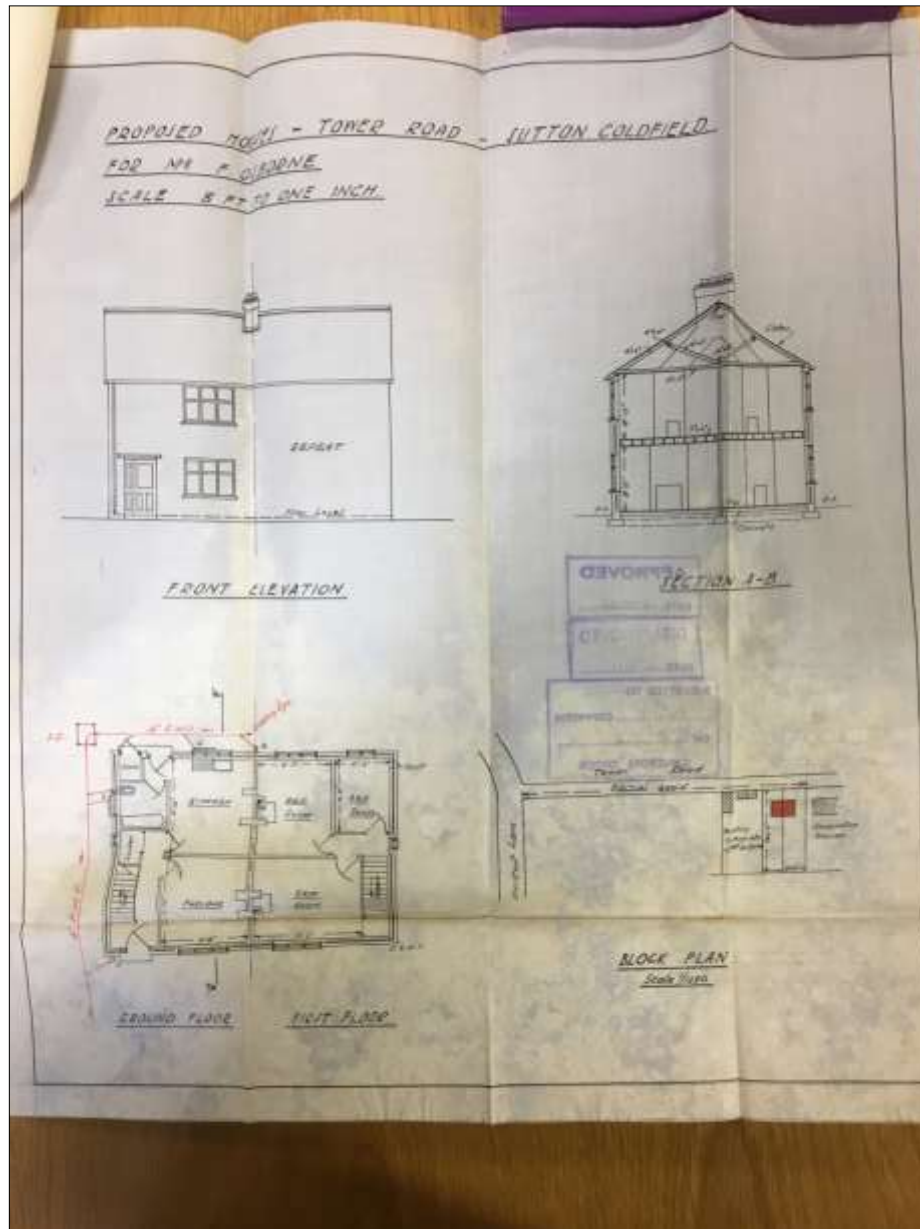
Another pastime that he was able to enjoy was driving a car. However, it would appear that he might just have been enjoying it too much on one occasion. Unfortunately, the Lichfield Mercury got hold of the story and one can possibly imagine how Fred may have felt to see his name in the paper on Friday, 16 November 1934. Both he and another man, Charles Henry Hales, were jointly summoned for driving without due care and attention at the Watford Gap cross roads.<sup>25</sup> Thankfully, there was a fortunate outcome!



Fred Osborne summoned!

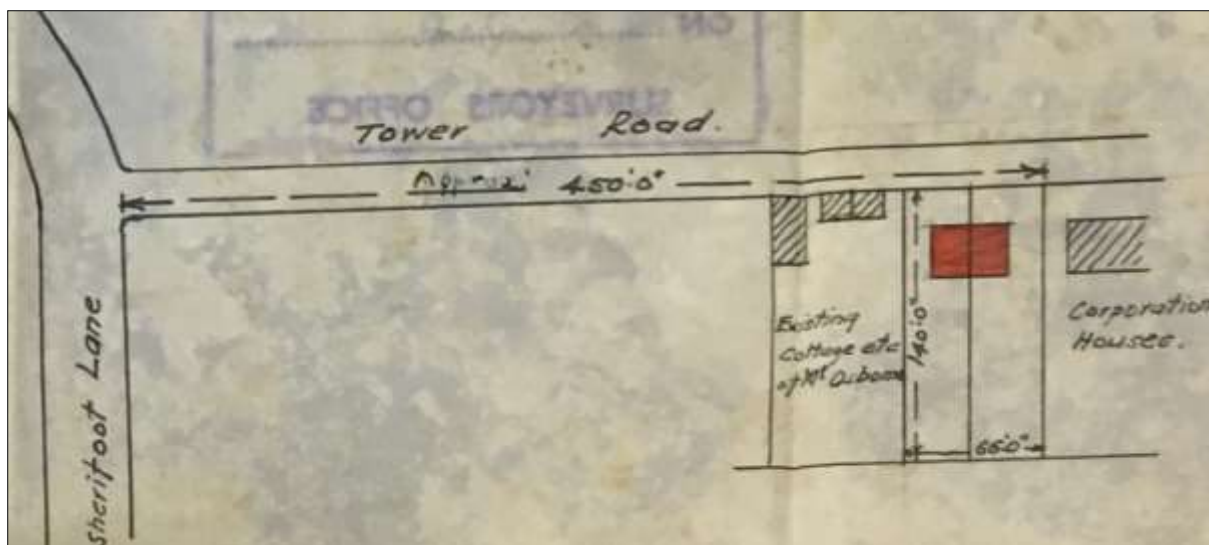
(Lichfield Mercury, Fri, 16 November 1934, British Newspaper Archive)

In October 1935, he put in another Planning Application (6942) to have two houses built on the other side of Tower Road.<sup>26</sup> The map here shows that these houses were to be built alongside other property which he appears to have owned. Unfortunately, no records have been found for them.



Planning Application 6942  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)





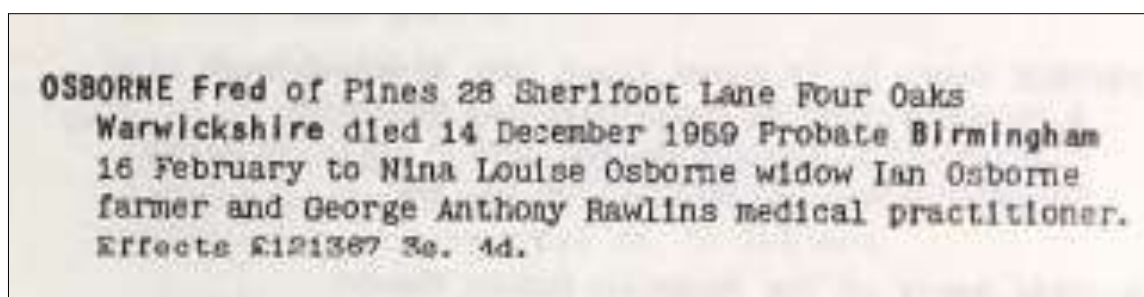
Expanded Planning Application 6942 (showing Mr Osborne's cottages.  
(See previous plan)

Little is known of Fred's personality, but we know that either he or his wife could probably play the piano. The Birmingham Mail of 16 January 1943 reveals that he was trying to sell a *Bluthner Boudoir Grand ebonised case Aliquot scale excel. cond. £150*. (Today, a used one might cost £5,000!).<sup>27</sup>



Advertisement for sale of Piano  
(Birmingham Mail, Sat. 16 January 1943, British Newspaper Archive)

On 14 December 1959, Fred died leaving an estate of £122,367.3.4 (worth nearly £3 million in 2020).<sup>27</sup> Nina passed away on 27th October 1960 in her 75th year, at 28 Sherifoot Lane and a service at Hill Church was held for her.<sup>28</sup>



Probate details of Fred Osborne  
(www.Ancestry.co.uk.)

The site of *The Pines* was very large and, being a boom-time for house building, a nationwide builder, George Wimpey & Co, located at Castle Bromwich, bought the site and was able to build 24 maisonette flats with adjacent gardens. A block of garages was built at the rear of the site. In 1966, my family bought one of the maisonettes in Tower Road, paying around £3,500. To reach the block of garages, one had to walk a good way around the whole site, so it seems the nickname of *the Round-about* could well have applied even then! In 2020, the flats remain, with well established gardens.

## Cleone de Hevenham Benest (aka Miss Griff) 1880-1963

Living as I did in one of the above maisonettes, the view from my upstairs window overlooked the large back garden of a house on the corner of Sherifoot Lane, being very well disguised by a long fence and giving no clues as to who lived there!



Overlooking the back fence of 26, Sherifoot Lane, late 1960

(Author's photo)

Having moved away, in 2016 I received a rather intriguing email enquiry from Dr Nina Baker, who had been commissioned by the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography to prepare an entry for a Miss Cleone de Hevingham Benest (aka Miss C. Griff). Miss Griff had been a resident of a house called *Wildwood, Four Oaks* in the 1920s. Dr Baker was interested to know if there were any local records as to the whereabouts of this house and the activities of Miss Griff during her stay in Sutton Coldfield.

Sutton Coldfield Library Electoral Registers soon revealed that *Wildwood*, being No. 26 Sherifoot Lane, was the house that my family overlooked in the 1960s.<sup>29</sup>

Dr Baker had already discovered much about the life of Cleone de Hevingham Benest (1880-1963), notably that, in her early years, she had also called herself Miss Cleone Griff or Miss Clayton Griff, the reason for the variation never having been fully explained. Her intriguing

story is told in copious detail in a variety of websites, predominately that written by Dr Baker, giving far more information than this account warrants.<sup>30</sup>

Suffice to say that old newspaper cuttings show Miss Griff to be a beautiful woman with amazing talents which, amongst other attributes, revealed her to be a pioneering female motorist with her own vehicles. At one time, on her 1939 registration for an ID card she also described herself as a Gyrotillage executive. These were the heaviest agricultural machines at that time, used for ripping up heavily overgrown land.<sup>31</sup> All of the following pictures have been taken from the various internet sites relating to her life.



Miss C. Griff, a beautiful woman

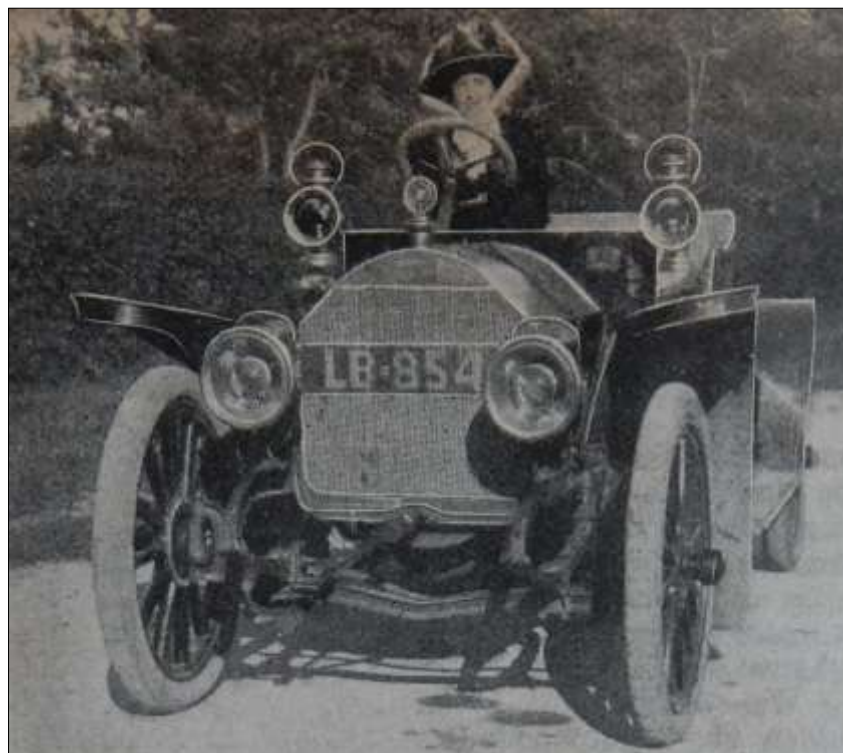
([www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names](http://www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names))





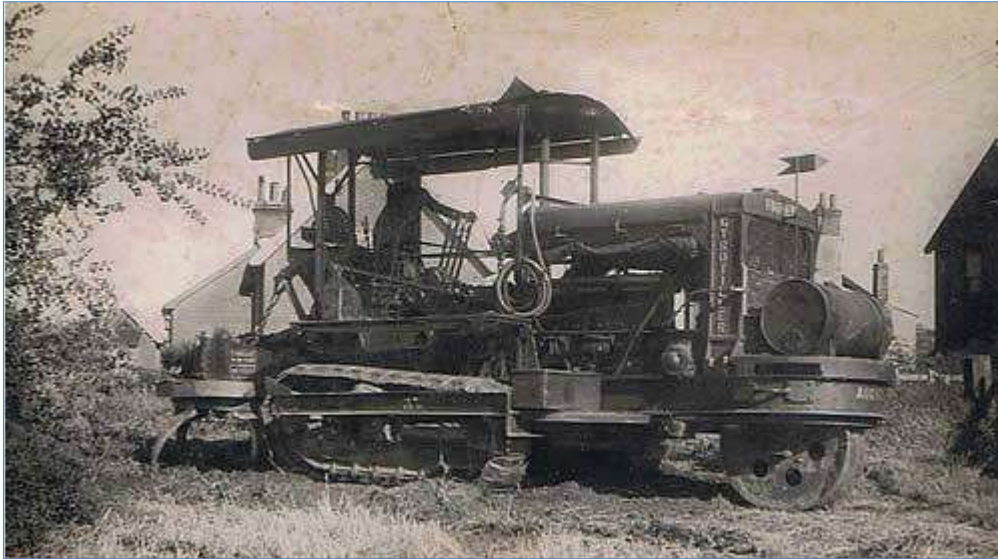
Miss Griff in her Lanchester Tonneau

([www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/engineer-of-the-week/49-cleone-de-hevingham-benest](http://www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/engineer-of-the-week/49-cleone-de-hevingham-benest))



Miss Griff in her Fiat

([www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names](http://www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names))



A Gyrotillage

([www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names](http://www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names))

She was also a professional engineer with her own company and factory , i.e. *The Stainless and Non-Corrosive Metals Company Limited* in 14 Weaman Street, Blrmingham, and a noted metallurgist. At one time, she was employed as a Government Aircraft Inspector with Messrs Vickers, Ltd. The following, taken from a newspaper article in 1922 ,records the setting up of that company:-

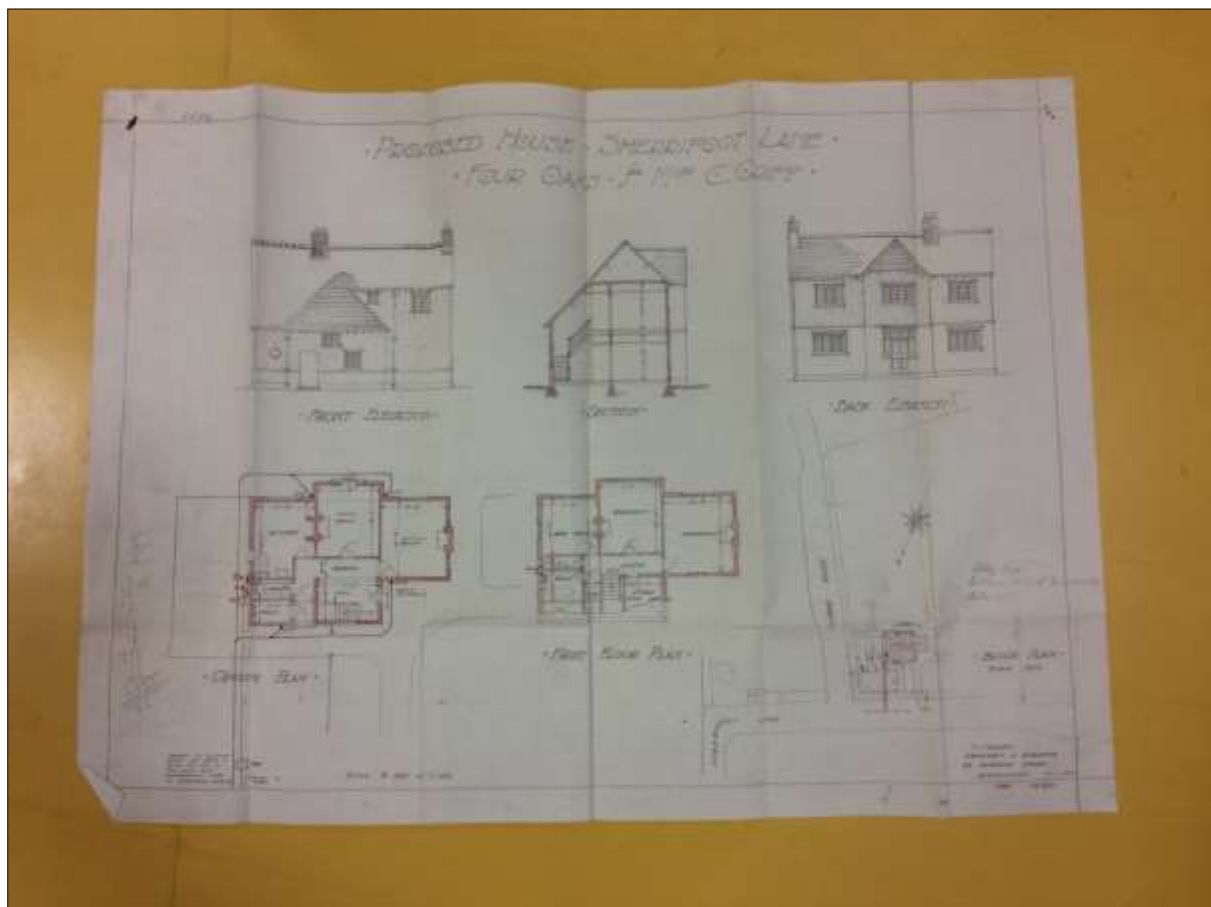
#### THE RUSTLESS MOVEMENT

*We have received particulars regarding the development of a recent movement having for its object the minimising of the enormous waste of iron, steel and other metals from the effects of corrosion. The company has been established with the title, The Stainless and Non-Corrosive Metal Company having their headquarters at Birmingham, which intends to specialise in the materials indicated by its name and also to act as an information bureau on the subject of stainless metals. The head of the business is Miss C. Griff, A.M.I.A.E., who has been for many years a departmental manager in the Birmingham district for Vickers, Ltd., in which position she had considerable experience in stainless metals. She is chairman of the Women's Engineering Society and a member of several associations connected with the metal industry.*

*Sheffield Daily Telegraph, Saturday, September 2, 1922<sup>32</sup>*

This article also revealed that Miss Griff lived in Birmingham before 1922, perhaps as a lodger somewhere. This gave a starting point from which to find the further information Dr Baker had requested. However, Miss Griff seems to have kept her movements fairly private. but, using the records in Sutton Coldfield Library, I was able to pass on certain details and the following gives just a brief idea as to her short stay in Sherifoot Lane.

On 19th February 1920, she was living at 7 Tudor Road, Sutton Coldfield when she put in a Planning Application (3004)<sup>33</sup> to Sutton Council to build a large, Edwardian, three bedroomed house, with very modern conveniences for those times, at the corner of Sherifoot Lane and Tower Road. This was to be called *Wildwood* and she lived there until at least 1924.<sup>34</sup>

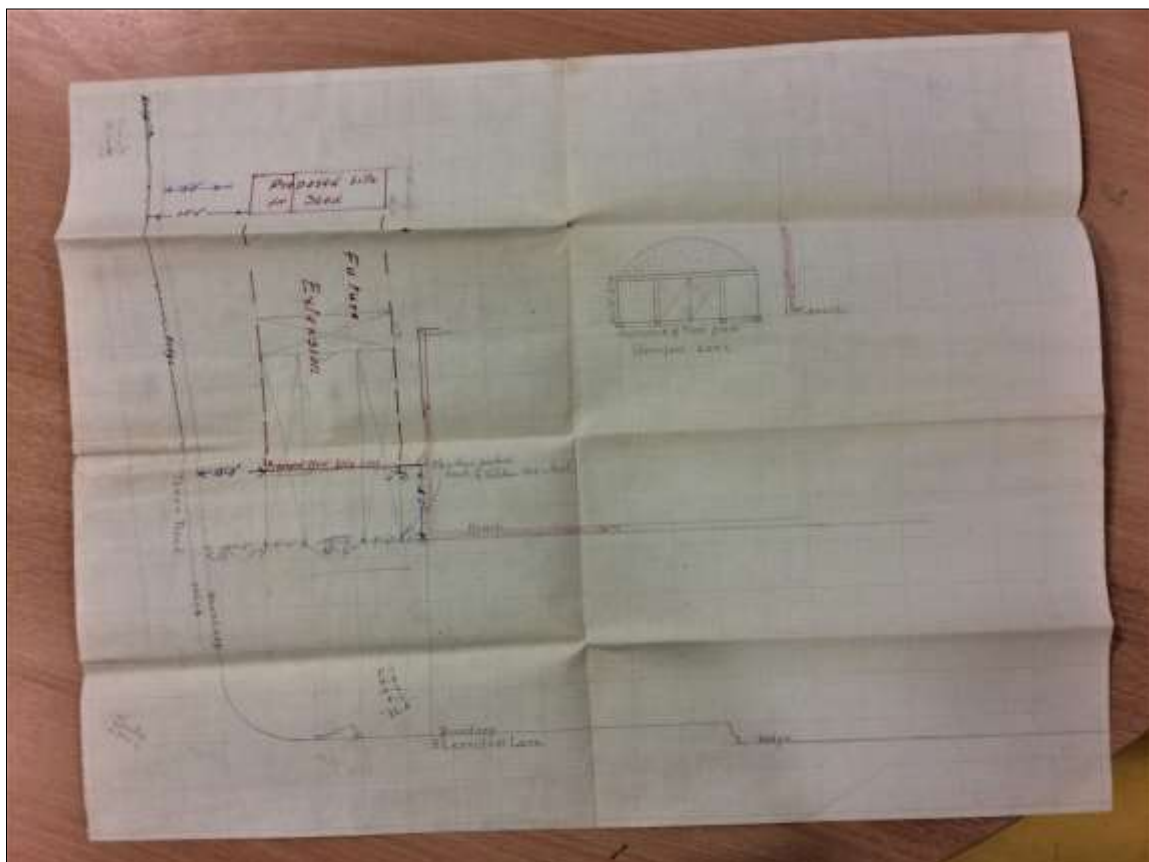


Planning Application for 'Wildwood'  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)

These were also the early years of Fred and Nina Osbourne's married life and I believe that all three would have been well acquainted, living at the top of Tower Road. In fact, both Fred and Cleone would have had something in common with their engineering backgrounds, Fred with his cycles and Cleone with her metallurgy.

Cleone's business at 14 Weaman Street was in the heart of the City very close the Snow Hill Railway Station and, being a car driver, it is possible she drove herself into work daily. Another option for her would be to take the train from Butlers Lane or Four Oaks Railway Station. It doesn't seem likely that she would catch the 'bus, because, although then running from Mere Green in 1920, it would not have been so convenient.

In April 1922 she put in another Planning Application, No. 3183,<sup>35</sup> to build a Motor House and Tool Shed at *Wildwood* and the newspapers managed to capture her picture as she stood outside it.<sup>36</sup> This shows a very able woman, ready to get her hands dirty.



Planning Application 3183, Her Temporary Motor House and Tool Shed  
(Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library)





Miss C. Griff standing beside her new shed  
(Birmingham Daily Gazette, Wednesday 11 April 1923, British Newspaper Archive)

Dr Baker was already aware that in 1923 Miss Griff was joined by Miss Caroline Maude Davis (1890-1972) of 'Ruxidie', Hartopp Road, Sutton Coldfield, who had a history of working in engineering at her father's ironfoundry at Wednesbury. She was there to assist in enlarging the scope of the business, making such things as stainless steel tin openers. She also invested in the company with members of her family and other aristocratic ladies. Unfortunately, Miss Griff was not such a great businesswoman and the company went into liquidation in 1924.<sup>37</sup>

Looking again at the Dr Baker's website, it is interesting to note the following:-

*Cleone joined the Women's Engineering Society shortly after its formation (using the name Miss C. Griff throughout her membership), and was elected to the chair of the WES Committee in 1922. She was very active in the society until 1928, organising the Birmingham branch which sometimes met at her home in the Four Oaks suburb of Birmingham. She also contributed regular articles to The Woman Engineer - Motoring and Aviation Notes – from 1923-27, and gave six broadcast talks in 1926-7 on BBC Radio (Station 5IT, Birmingham), for the "Afternoon Topics" slot aimed at housewife listeners, on various aspects of engineering. In*

*1928 Miss C. Griff suddenly cut her ties with WES without explanation and seems not to have used this name again. Her sudden departure may have been due to an urgent need to go back to the Isle of Wight to look after her widowed mother who died in 1930, leaving almost no money. Having used the name Griff professionally and even for the official Electoral Roll for 1923-25, it is curious that she abandoned the name.*<sup>38</sup>

This article appears to suggest that she lived in Birmingham until 1928, yet her name no longer appears in the Sutton Coldfield Electoral Registers after 1924, leaving us with yet another mystery to fathom when considering her amazing life!

Sadly, *Wildwood* no longer exists and, as with *The Pines*, it has been replaced with a small residential development. It is now over 200 years since this area was known as *the Roundabout* and now the nickname no longer seems to apply.



The two developments replacing *The Pines* and *Wildwood* on the corner of Sherifoot Lane  
( Google earth, 2020)

Janet Jordan  
May, 2020

## SOURCES

1. LEA, Roger: Scenes from Sutton's Past, pub. Westwood Press Publications 1989, p21
2. AZ Street Atlas, West Midlands/Birmingham, Edition 5, 2015. p43
3. Enclosure/Corn Rent Map showing field names, Sutton Coldfield Library
4. BRACKEN, Agnes: History of the Forest & Chase of Sutton Coldfield, pub: Simpkin Marshall & Co. 1860, P119
5. LEA, RM: History Spot, 01/02/2013, Sir William Dugdale's Antiquities of Warwickshire 1656 ([www.sclhrg.org.uk](http://www.sclhrg.org.uk))
6. Victoria County History - Staffordshire - a History of the County of Stafford, Volume 3, House of the Benedictine Monks, The Priory of Canwell (fn.40) ([www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol3/pp213-216](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol3/pp213-216))
7. Sutton Coldfield Sales Catalogue 1790-1892, Sutton Coldfield Library (Ref: QSH58.9)
8. Ditto
9. [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
10. LEA, Roger, 'History Spot', Hill [42], [www.sclhrg.org.uk](http://www.sclhrg.org.uk)
11. Corn Rent Schedule, Sutton Coldfield Library
12. [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
13. [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
14. Parochial Valuation, 1857, Sutton Coldfield Library
15. Census Returns, [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
16. Census Returns, [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
17. Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library
18. [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
19. Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library
20. Ditto
21. [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk).
22. Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library
23. Electoral Register, Sutton Coldfield Library
24. Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library
25. [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)
26. Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library
27. [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk)
28. Probate: [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
29. Electoral Registers, Sutton Coldfield Library
30. <https://www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/engineer-of-the-week/49-cleone-de-hevingham-benest>
31. [www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names](http://www.womenengineerssite.wordpress.com/2019/02/19/miss-benest-and-miss-griff-one-woman-several-names)
32. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, Saturday, September 2, 1922, British Newspaper Archive
33. Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library
34. Electoral Registers, Sutton Coldfield Library
35. Building Plans Index, Sutton Coldfield Library
36. Birmingham Daily Gazette, Wednesday 11 April 1923, British Newspaper Archive
37. [www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/engineer-of-the-week/49-cleone-de-hevingham-benest](http://www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/engineer-of-the-week/49-cleone-de-hevingham-benest)
38. [www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/engineer-of-the-week/49-cleone-de-hevingham-benest](http://www.magnificentwomen.co.uk/engineer-of-the-week/49-cleone-de-hevingham-benest)