

# The stone houses of Bishop Vesey in Sutton Coldfield:

a summary of research to the 2020s

by Stella Thebridge



A map imagined by Norman G Evans

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## Note

*As reference is made to so many buildings in this article, Appendix 3 provides a 'one to a page' listing, with images, of each of those confirmed or suggested as a Vesey house. Please refer to this for further information at any point while reading about a particular building, where the building name is in bold type.*

## Synopsis

Arising from a talk for The Sutton Coldfield Civic Society given by the author on Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 2023 during *Birmingham Heritage Week in Sutton Coldfield 2023*, this article attempts to bring together the work of numerous writers on the subject, from the first records of the houses to the definitive work by Harcourt and Chatwin of 1941 and beyond, with updates from more recent local historians like Norman Evans and Roger Lea.

The status of one remaining house in particular, in a remote location at High Heath on the outskirts of the Town, has been the subject of intermittent interest for decades and was brought to a head with the sale of the property by auction at the end of 2022. Local historian Keith Jordan (2022) wrote a very full and useful summary of the history of this house, not only its physical history but also describing the families that lived there.

With the advent of social media, and numerous websites and Facebook groups now devoted to the history of the Royal Town of Sutton Coldfield, there are frequent questions about the houses in general and sometimes particular ones as they change hands or families start researching their own history and realise they have some past association with a house.

The talk that was given by the author in September 2023 attempted to bring together the proven facts about the houses, taking as its starting point the Chatwin and Harcourt article, the good work completed by Keith Jordan on the **High Heath** house which also had useful general information, various mentions in larger works around the history of the Town and other disparate materials relating to the houses as a whole, from "History Spot" newspaper articles by Roger Lea to newspaper cuttings and sales particulars, all housed in Sutton Coldfield Library.

As a result of the desk research undertaken and then the talk itself, it was clear that this is a subject of continuing interest and that, as well as updates since the 1940s, there are still many debatable 'facts' as to the origins of the houses, their purpose and how many are actually left, either in their entirety or subsumed into later buildings. So this article is very much a drawing together of what is known, what is debatable (and why) and questions that still remain – a work in progress which hopefully will spark some corrections and additions to the information presented for an updated version at a future date.

## The building of the houses

The first reference to the stone houses is from John Leland, an antiquary sent by Henry VIII to various locations in the late 1530s to early 1540s<sup>1</sup>, including Sutton Coldfield, where he wrote of Bishop John Vesey:

*He buildyd dyvars praty howsys of stone in the forest, and plantyd his pore kynesmen in them, allotynge ground conveniently unto the howsys, for the whiche the tenaunts bere the Kynge a mean rent.*

[This could be put into modern language as follows:

*He built a variety of pretty houses of stone in the forest, and established his poor kinsmen in them, allotting ground (land) conveniently to the houses, for which the tenants bore (paid) the King a nominal rent.]*

This must have been relatively soon after the construction of the houses, as Vesey is known to have come back to his native town in 1523 for the funeral of his mother and then his brother, and it was from this time that he sought to make a range of improvements in the town, of which the building of more substantial homes for working people was one.

In this short text we learn that:

- the houses are of stone (rather than the more prevalent wood)
- they are pleasant to look at
- they have land for people to engage in work of some kind
- Vesey has installed his “kinsmen” in them.

We will return to these different purposes in more detail. Meanwhile a century or so later, Sir William Dugdale, in his “Antiquities of Warwickshire” published in 1656, recounts (2<sup>nd</sup> ed, p 913) that Bishop Vesey built fifty-one stone houses in Sutton Coldfield (using the Roman numerals “Li”), the number quoted almost universally ever since for the total built, though there is no earlier record of the exact number. The only slight variation is Midgley (1904) who says there were 52 houses built (p 49) but there is no source given for this.

Andrew Watkins (2022) who has researched the mediaeval development of north Warwickshire towns suggests the population grew in Great Sutton (the area of the town centre and immediate surroundings) from some 120 in Domesday Book year (1086), to 320 in 1332 and slightly higher to 400 by 1523, when Vesey made his return to the town.

Great Sutton was one of the administrative quarters of the town (actually five in total) and some of the houses were in fact in the other quarters: Hill and Little Sutton; More and Ashfurlong; Maney and The Wylde; Walmley and Beyond the Woods.

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<sup>1</sup> Alcock has 1538 for the visit to Sutton Coldfield and Lea and Jordan cite 1543-44.

## Purpose of the houses

Leland gives the purpose of the building programme as a workplace for cottage industry as well as a pleasant place for the workers and their families in which to live. He also states that Vesey appears to have been looking after his wider family, though 'poor kinsmen' might have extended as a term to mean all his less well-off neighbours or, as we might put it, the wider family of Sutton Coldfield inhabitants, given there were only some 400 in total.

Dugdale's account continues:

"And for the prevention of robberies which were in those days frequent upon the road across Bassetts Heath (leading from Lichfield to London) he erected a house...in a kind of desert place near Canwell Gate, wherein he placed one of his own domestic servants to reside...". (Dugdale (1730, p914)

This would add weight to the idea that he was looking after members of his household (not just his blood relations) and also confirms why some of the houses were built on the rural edges of the town. The house referred to above by Dugdale still exists, forming part of Vesey Grange in Weeford Road, and this security angle also explains the occurrence of several houses in the rural vicinity of Ashfurlong Hall (in the More and Ashfurlong quarter).

It should also be noted that the houses that remain are those not demolished or built over in previous centuries and these have inevitably survived because of their continuing rural aspect.

As to the construction of the houses (in sandstone), Chatwin and Harcourt's article remains the best account of this with excellent photographs and drawings of floor plans. They assert in their article that the stone (which was re-assembled rubble from local quarries) was cheaper and quicker to use than wood which needed to be seasoned. Also, the timber frameworks needed to be crafted and erected by skilled craftsmen rather than unskilled labourers (see Appendix 1).

Roger Lea concurs, and also gives useful insight into the development subsequently of wooden houses, [these of course falling out of favour again when the tightly-packed buildings succumbed to fires in London and other cities in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century – a local example being the fire of Warwick in 1694.]

"Built in the 1520s and 30s, the stone houses with their massive chimneys and spiral staircases were a big improvement on the vernacular houses of the day, single-storey halls with an open fire in the centre of the room and louvres in the thatched roof to allow the smoke to escape. However, in the next hundred years many timber-framed houses were built to a better design, more practical and comfortable, and most of the stone houses were abandoned. A few of the stone houses were modernised with new wings and extensions, but many of them became the humble cottages of labouring men or were even used as barns and stables". (Lea, 2014c) (see also Appendix 2)

## Cottage Industry

Another major purpose of the houses was provision of a suitable setting for home employment, notably kersey weaving, about which much has been written locally, generally confirming this as John Vesey's least successful project to improve his native town.

In brief, Vesey introduced a cloth-making process which he had seen work well in other areas including Devon (he was Bishop of Exeter). A kersey was a piece of cloth about a metre wide and sixteen metres long. Kersey weaving was labour-intensive and could require the work of fifteen people to make just one kersey in a week (Lea, 2010c). Vesey brought in skilled weavers from Honeybourne in Worcestershire to set up the trade in Sutton, with some of the new stone houses offering reasonable premises for this to take place as a cottage industry. Sadly, despite the good planning by Vesey and the abundance of sheep locally to provide the wool, the industry never really took off. With hindsight, a variety of reasons for this have been suggested - the unsuitability of the local climate, distance from ports and the fact that the industry itself was already in decline.

In terms of the houses, larger windows were installed to enable greater daylight to work by. This is evident at **High Heath Cottage** in particular and in the illustration (Fig. 1) of the blocked weaver's window at **Ashfurlong Hall** described by Roger Lea (2010e).



*Fig: 1: Ashfurlong Hall - blocked weavers' window*

AF Fentiman (2004, p4) describes both the house on the corner of **Rectory Road** and **Bedford Road** and number **3 Coleshill Street** as follows:

Riland Bedford mentions a cottage on the opposite side of the road to the 1701 Rectory (i.e. Rectory Road) which had weavers' windows<sup>12</sup>. These inordinately wide windows were a feature of weavers' cottages and this leads to the suspicion that 3 Coleshill Street was a weaver's house. Here the window opening to the left of the entrance was originally seven feet wide now infilled to accommodate a sash half that width). Some<sup>13</sup> of the houses in Coleshill Street were reputedly built by Vesey as weavers' cottages and this could well be one — nos. 1 and 3 are stone houses faced with brick.

More about both of these houses follows later in this article.

## History from nineteenth century

Agnes Bracken gives a useful summary of the houses from a nineteenth century perspective:

“The fifty-one houses built by the bishop were of various dimensions. Some have stood the wear of three centuries. The old part of Ashfurlong House, the White House near the Rectory, and the Warren House, are examples of massive farm buildings, and the stone house on the Ebrook, and small dwellings at High Heath, Little Sutton and elsewhere, with Tudor-arched doorways, and, in a few instances, spiral stairs, still linger to the memory. Several ancient houses of stone in the town have been partly reconstructed, or faced with brick.” (Bracken, 1860, p118-119)

Tantalisingly, this gives no idea of the numbers of cottages remaining at this date, though a passage in a letter published in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1844 states “he built a large number of stone houses in various parts of the parish; of these nearly 20 are still standing”, thus giving us the indication that a good number more were identifiable in the mid-nineteenth century than currently remain (anon, 1844).

This letter also states:

“The town of Sutton consists of one long street, through which the road from Birmingham to Lichfield passes. About the middle of the street stands the town hall, or Moot Hall as it is called, an ugly brick building of the last century. Higher up is one of Bishop Vesey's stone houses, probably his winter residence. The exterior is almost entirely grown over with yew. On the gable end are the arms of Vesey and Henry VIII and figures of the Trinity and Virgin Mary, rudely carved in stone and much dilapidated.” (ibid)

From this description of the main road (now the A5127) we can conclude that the Vesey house described here is the old **Tithe Barn**, described by Roger Lea as having been “built by Bishop Vesey for the Rector, and incorporating some of the carved stones from the Chapel of St. Blaise at the ruined Manor House.” (Lea, 2010b). In a subsequent *History Spot* about the carved stones on the Tithe Barn, Lea writes:

“These stone carvings from the Chapel of St. Blaise were recovered from the old manor house and inserted in the gable of this building in High Street in the sixteenth century. The building was demolished in 1878, and the stones were removed to Sutton Churchyard.” (Lea, 2011)

Lea suggests the barn became a malthouse subsequently.

The question must be, as the carvings described are totally different, that there may have been yet another building that is the Vesey house. The fact that the 1844 letter says “higher up the street” might discount the possibility of this being the house known as No. 1 High Street (now occupied by a legal firm) as this is the very first house, so not adjacent to the railway cutting.

However, in yet another *History Spot* by Lea about the High Street properties and the demolition of no. 58 to make way for the railway, he writes:

“The malthouse was also demolished when the railway came, but Richard Holbeche [a nineteenth century diarist] could remember it as ‘a veritable relic of the past. The

old Malt House of rough sandstone, with the remains of roughcast upon it, with yew trees on either side of the porch. Brick steps ran to an upper storey...it had evidently in a previous age been a dwellinghouse of some little consideration. It had mullioned windows, and on the north gable were quaint old sandstone figures which are now built into the wall to the new aisle of the church.' " (Lea, 2017b)

**58 High Street** is on the East side of the road (RH side coming out of Sutton centre) and no. 56 remains, so the malthouse must have actually been beyond no 58, as evidenced by a photograph shown in Appendix 3.

The house described by Bracken fleetingly as "The White House near the Rectory" bears further investigation.

We now know that the house on the opposite corner from Ashfurlong Hall at the Tamworth Road and Whitehouse Common Road junction (now a junction with traffic lights and the site being where the Ashfurlong clinic now stands) was known as **The White House** and bears the look of a standard private dwelling in latter years until its demolition in the 1960s.

There is now confirmation from photographs of a cottage named by the Revd William Kirkpatrick Riland Bedford in one of his papers about the Town's history as being on the opposite side of the road to the Rectory (Fentiman, *ibid*) (this being the Rectory in Rectory Park situated near *The Boot* public house). This is confirmed as at the junction of Rectory Road and Bedford Road and described as "near the Rectory" in a scrapbook of images dating from the late nineteenth century held by the late Norman G Evans (see Appendix 3 – **Bedford Rd/Rectory Rd corner**).

In terms of a house being an example of a "massive farm building" as Bracken puts it, this is more likely to be **Whitehouse Common Farm**, cited by Chatwin and Harcourt (p. 16).

Chatwin and Harcourt (1941) wrote what is still considered the definitive work about the houses.<sup>2</sup>, giving a reasoned and researched summary of information available at the time, but we are blessed in the twenty-first century with more recent information, in some cases of the demolition of particular houses, but also about more of those that might have survived. One of the legacies of their timely article was that, while there was, sadly, no move to ensure preservation of all the remaining houses as a group, those that did remain were listed as historic buildings between the 1940s and 1970s, for which we in this century must be very thankful.

Roger Lea's useful short history of the houses, published as a "History Spot" in the local newspaper in 2015, is reproduced as Appendix 2.

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<sup>2</sup> Their article in the proceedings of the Birmingham Archaeological Society discusses not only the stone houses but other extant buildings from mediaeval times, notably The Smithy and Grove End (Also known as Bumble End).

A newspaper cutting about the book's publication notes that 500 copies were printed and the proceeds given to charity. ("Sutton Housing scheme..." 1947) and confirms a date of 1947 for the reprint of this article in book form, also evidenced by a purchase form in the copy owned by the author of this article.

## Surviving houses

In the recent new edition of Pevsner's guide to local buildings including those in Sutton Coldfield, Andy Foster confirms that the houses were built between 1527 and 1543 (Foster, 2022, p449). He also cites five surviving houses as follows:

- Vesey Cottage, Maney Hill Rd (the largest)\*
- Warren House Farm, Walmley Road\*
- Vesey Cottage, Wylde Green Rd\*
- Vesey Grange, Weeford Rd\*
- High Heath Cottage, off Withy Hill Rd (the smallest)\*.

This is correct in terms of those that are substantially unaltered, but this article will also examine those that have been materially altered or subsumed into later buildings as well as attempting to describe the history of those that were demolished, where that demolition is recorded. There will also be some discussion of other buildings, now altered, which have been suggested as forming part of the "fifty-one".

In terms of those houses remaining into the twentieth century, a paragraph in *The Birmingham Post* of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1956 relating to the imminent demolition of Little Sutton Cottage states:

"Eight of the original 51 cottages built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by Bishop Vesey to house poor people of Sutton Coldfield still remain. They are all occupied but soon there may be only seven." (see Appendix 3)

The known houses in addition to the above which are known to have been part of Vesey's building programme are as follows. Those demolished are included in italics:

- Ashfurlong Hall (part)
- *Little Sutton Cottage, Little Sutton Road\**
- Moor Hall Farm\*
- *The White House\**.

Others in contention are:

- 1-3 Coleshill Street
- *Bedford Rd / Rectory Rd corner*
- High Street – various houses(*some demolished*)
- *St Mary's Hall or House*
- *Tithe Barn, High Street*
- *Whitehouse Common Farm\**.

Rather than repeat information given in previous writing about the houses and other buildings under discussion, it is left to the reader to use Appendix 3 to see brief information and photographs or other drawings pertaining to each.

The following is a summary of the similarities of particular groups of houses and more detail of those which date from the sixteenth century (the time of Bishop Vesey) and might therefore reasonably have formed part of the total 51 dwellings documented by historians.



The houses asterisked (\*) in the lists above are all mentioned in some measure in Chatwin and Harcourt's article. They include plans of all of these mentioned except **St Mary's Hall** as it was long demolished and **Whitehouse Common Farm**, though confusingly they caption the plan for **The White House** on page 15 erroneously as the Farm (see Appendix 3).

Mis-naming is clear in an OS map of 1920 (Fig. 2) showing **Whitehouse Common Farm** in the middle foot of the picture (directly below the large letter "C" of Coldfield) and **The White House** (towards the top LH). Both are mis-labelled - 'Whitehouse / White House Farm'.

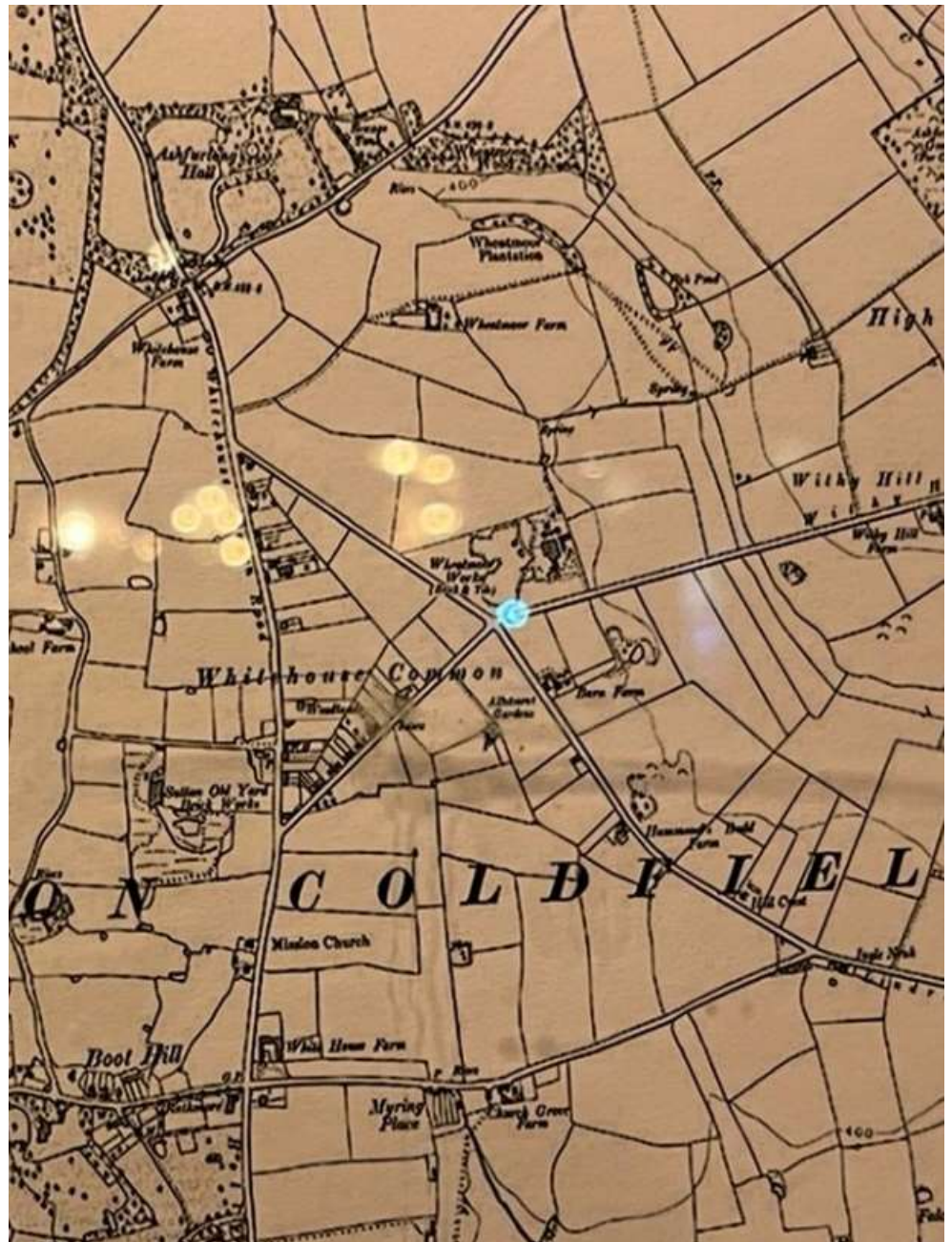


Fig. 2: Location of Whitehouse Common Farm and The White House (OS 1920)

Chatwin and Harcourt (1941) show clearly that, while the layouts and sizes differ, the key features of spiral stone staircase, two or sometimes three floors with a single room on each, all typical of a small house of the time, are central to all eight remaining houses to which they refer. Their set of plans is reproduced at Fig. 3. It shows first a layout captioned Old Moor Hall (the Bishop's birthplace), though this is now considered to be **Moor Hall Farm** (see Appendix 3). This is seen as the model for the other houses, whose plans are also shown.

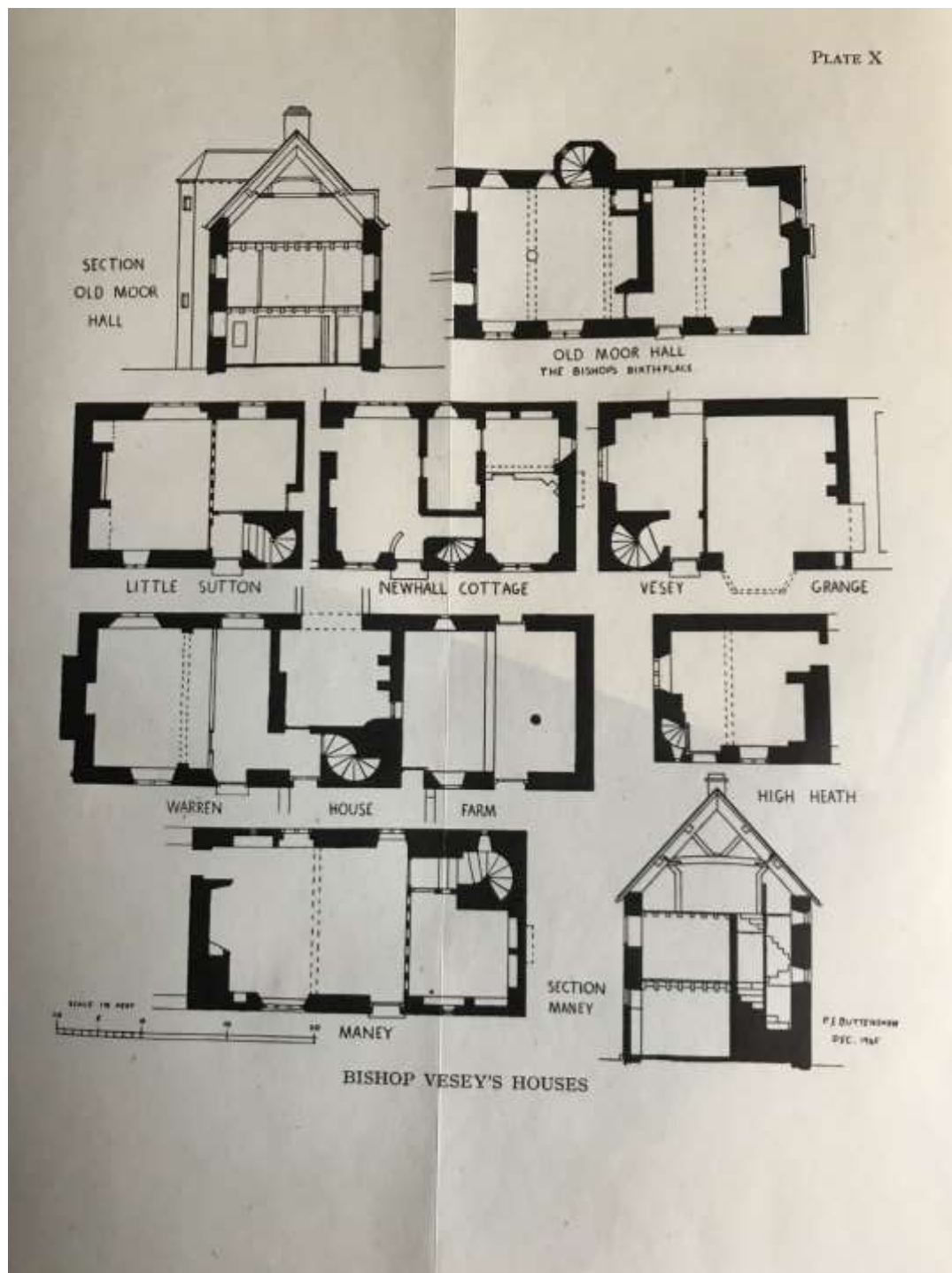


Fig 3: Vesey houses – plans by Chatwin and Harcourt, 1941 (facing page 18)

Of **Ashfurlong Hall** Roger Lea writes:

“At Ashfurlong the original farmhouse was one of the Bishop Vesey stone houses, little more than a cottage, but to this another bay of stone was added and then it was extended again in brick, making it sufficient for a wealthy yeoman. The house was converted into a gentleman’s seat in about 1800 ... [and] built of stone from a quarry a few yards away.” (Lea, 2010e)

It has not proved possible in recent years to visit Ashfurlong Hall or find images of the interior to shed light on any remaining features of the original Vesey house subsumed into the later Hall. Photographs of the exterior are in Appendix 3.

**High Heath Cottage** has generated a large amount of interest during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

It has remained in a rural aspect set back between the Tamworth Road and Withy Hill Road and accessible best by walkers on the public footpaths nearby. Its history is thoroughly charted by Keith Jordan and readers are recommended to go to this for a detailed history of the cottage and its various phases of extension as well as the stories of the owners and tenants over the centuries.

A range of images is at Appendix 3.

### **Little Sutton Cottage**

This now lost cottage was, again, on the outskirts of the Town in what has always been known as the separate settlement of Little Sutton.

Despite attempts to save it, the house was demolished in 1957/8 to make way for the Heathcroft Estate.

A paragraph in *The Birmingham Post* of 4<sup>th</sup> May 1956 notes the Council decision to demolish the cottage if a buyer cannot be found. An offer made by a local businessman and councillor to save the cottage was refused by the owners. Sadly historic listing was not possible either (see articles in Appendix 3).

It is interesting to note a further article from *The Birmingham Post* in 1958 (Fig. 4) relating to this cottage which shows the newly formed Sutton Coldfield Civic Society undertaking a survey of the site, following demolition, to see whether any items of interest might be found. It is not clear that much was revealed.



Fig 4: Birmingham Post 22 Aug 1958<sup>3</sup>

### **Moor Hall Farm**

Said by some to be the birthplace of Bishop Vesey, this is now known not to be possible, as the house conforms to the pattern of the other stone houses (built by him!) and is deemed by Chatwin and Harcourt to be the model for them. Vesey was probably born and raised on a former cottage for which records exist from 1434.

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<sup>3</sup> This article incorrectly gives the site of the demolished house as Little Sutton Lane when it should be Little Sutton Road



Some also confuse the Farm house with the grand Moor Hall which Vesey built as his dwelling for a large household in 1525. (This hall was subsequently replaced).

Roger Lea speculates:

“Bishop Vesey was born at Moor Hall some time between 1452 and 1465 and returned to settle in Sutton in the 1520s. He was a wealthy man, and built himself a grand new Moor Hall in 1525 on the site of the present Moor Hall Hotel. Did he leave the old Moor Hall standing, the stone building now Moor Hall Farm, or was the old Moor Hall a timber-framed building like all the other big houses of the time in this area, demolished to make way for the new 1525 building?” (Lea, 2013)

We may never know. Andy Foster describes Old Moor Hall Farm as “a 15<sup>th</sup> century stone house.” (Foster, 2022, p. 462)

### **Vesey Cottage, Maney**

The largest of the remaining houses is close to St Peter’s Church on Maney Hill Road and was used for some years in the twentieth century as the residence for the vergers at the church. An article from 1974 (*Fig. 5*) points to repairs by the church at that time and opportunities for the public to view the house.



*Fig 5: Sutton Coldfield News, 19 April 1974*

The house is currently in private hands and well-maintained.

### **Vesey Grange**

William Dargue notes:

“In the north of Sutton at Hill Common, a much altered Vesey house stands on Weeford Road. It is believed to be the first house to have been built in this area of ‘waste’.” (Dargue, 2017)

It has been much altered and extended. The cottage is the present south part of the building, with its staircase at the SE corner. Andy Foster states that the lower North part is timber-framed and probably 17<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps a barn (Foster, 2022, p. 449)

Roger Lea writes:

“The house in Weeford Road became a labourer’s cottage, and over time three more simple brick-built cottages were added to it to make a row of four cottages - the same thing happened at another Vesey house, High Heath Cottage. A survey of 1824 shows that the property belonged to Sir Robert Lawley of Canwell Hall, the three-quarter acre plot being divided into four tenements and gardens, occupied by Thomas Broughton, John Brown, William Heney and Robert Houghton. Another survey of 1856 shows that ownership had changed to the Warden and Society of Sutton Coldfield, and although three of the cottages and gardens were occupied, the fourth was uninhabited, rented by a local farmer and described as a yard with barns, a stable and a pigsty.

By 1880 the property again consisted of a row of four cottages, and in 1901 there were four households living there, headed by a stockman working on a local farm, two stonebreakers employed on maintaining the roads, and a carter. But fashions were changing, and wealthy men were seeking historic buildings to convert into comfortable homes rather than build on new sites. The old stone house in Weeford Road was extended at the back with a new range of building, the adjoining cottages were converted to house more rooms, a coach house and stables. The 1911 census gives Charles Keith Lloyd, a gentleman of means, living at “Vesey Grange” with his family and servants.” (Lea, 2014c)

### **Vesey House / Ford Keeper’s Cottage**

This is probably one of the best known of the surviving houses because of its location close both to New Hall Hotel and the Mill. It is prominent for those walking or cycling through the New Hall Valley Country Park and is visible from the main road (Wylde Green Road) for drivers. It is also near Bishop Walsh School and, as it has business premises, is often visited. (Foster notes “three surviving windows with replaced mullions”, 2022, p449)

The cottage is by the stream known as the Ebrook (also known as Plantsbrook) and was the ford keeper’s house in a marshy area, though now channelled so that it is difficult to imagine its being a challenge for travellers. However *Fig 6* shows what it was still like at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.



*Fig 6: Ford-keeper’s cottage, early 20<sup>th</sup> century*

The ford was one of few firm river crossings, where the ford keeper would have seen people safely across as well as collecting their toll.

The house has been relatively little altered since the sixteenth century. Andy Foster notes “three surviving windows with replaced mullions” (Foster, 2022, p.450). The last sale in 1984 resulted in sensitive refurbishment of the cottage. The same owner purchased the cottage at High Heath in 2022 and it is to be hoped this will also be sensitively treated, though its condition is very different from that of the Wylde Green house in the 1980s.

### **Warren House Farm**

William Dargue describes the farm as “tucked away behind the houses off Walmley Road”. He continues:

... Although considerably altered since the 16th century, it nonetheless has a Grade II Listing. Attached to the farmhouse is a granary which may be older than the Vesey house and which has had to be supported at some time in the past by buttresses.” (Dargue, 2017)

Foster describes it as “much extended” (2022, p.450) and we are fortunate to have access to sales particulars from 1998 in the local library which show the layout at the time and photographs (see Appendix 3).

### **The White House**

Not to be confused with Whitehouse Farm (see page 8 above), The White House stood on the site of what is now Ashfurlong Clinic on the corner of Whitehouse Common Road and Tamworth Road.

It was demolished in 1965 as being beyond repair.

The land in what Roger Lea describes as the “Whitehouse Triangle” – between Lindridge Rd, Whitehouse Common Rd and Withy Hill Rd, (Lea, 2012c) was divided up in 1824 among a number of landowners including one David Whitehouse.

### **What happened to the other Vesey houses?**

William Dargue writes:

“Neither the location nor the fate of the remaining Vesey houses is known. It is more remarkable that five have stood for 500 years than that the others seem to have disappeared without trace. Buildings that survive for this length of time are almost invariably houses of high status and not the houses of the common folk. Presumably, over time, the Vesey houses fell into neglect and disuse. However, it is pretty certain that the well-cut stones were reused, and they may survive as the foundations of later buildings across the area.” (Dargue, 2017)

In his estimation there are 5 remaining houses, but as we have seen there are more of which we have some history and in some cases photographs which take us to a definite nine of which something is known. Other contenders are described in the following section, with those where it is not possible to be sure also featuring in Appendix 3.

In an article by Emma Williams in 1991 an older house on Reddicap Hill was cited as one of several to be considered for listed building status. “The single storey house at **59 Reddicap Hill** is thought to be a Bishop Vesey cottage dating from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.”



Fig 7: Sutton Coldfield News, 1991

Further interest was engendered in 2019 when it changed use from a funeral directors' premises to a residential house. However, Janet Jordan wrote extensively about this building with a useful update in 2024 (Jordan, J 1995) and historian Andy Foster describes it as "a small stone cottage, probably 17<sup>th</sup> century, much extended." (Foster, 2022, p. 463).

Another contender, not recognised in any articles about the cottages, but offering from its exterior enough to intrigue the author, is the 16<sup>th</sup> century **New Hall chapel cottage** in the grounds of New Hall, the mediaeval hall which now forms part of a hotel. A picture in Appendix 3 shows the building currently. It is certainly of the same style as the other houses and known to be from that century. The interior is apparently now just a storage space with no identifiable features to help identify it as a Vesey house.

While it may have been the site of a chapel, from the design this does not seem likely to have been one itself.

Foster describes it thus:

“Chapel Cottage, NE, is rubble stone, probably 16<sup>th</sup> century. Two- and three-light mullioned windows in both gable-ends, corbelled-out chimney.” (Foster, 2022, p 465)

Foster’s dating differs from that of the Victoria County History authors of 1947, who are in turn quoted in the Historic England building listing, giving a 17<sup>th</sup> century date. Some facts in the VCH volume have been revised, so this building seems now to fit the bill as being a potential Vesey cottage. The full quotation from VCH is at Appendix 3.

The row of dwellings known today as **1,3 and 5 Coleshill Street** are deemed to have originated in Vesey’s time though with facades added in subsequent centuries. Fentiman’s observation that there are signs of a large weavers’ window being replaced at no. 3 points to the possibility that this was one of the original dwellings designed for kersey weaving, though the current layout does not appear to conform to the usual Vesey cottage pattern. These houses have been variously owned and rented by different people.

Some historians surmise that nos 1-3 were a Rectory for the incumbent of the church before the building of the Rectory in Rectory Park in 1701. 1-3 Coleshill Street was certainly purchased by the incoming Rector Richard Bisse Riland in 1757, following the death of his father (the previous Rector), as a place for his widowed mother Mary, while RB Riland and his family moved into the 1701 Rectory. This same house was sold for a nominal price to the Holbeche family in 1817.<sup>4</sup>

The coming of the railway brings us on to the buildings in High Street (the continuation of Coleshill Street becoming Lichfield Road beyond the railway). **Houses in the High Street** show evidence of Georgian facades covering earlier front walls and foundations, and this points to the possibility of houses in this road, the main road of the Town at that point, having been part of the 51 in question. Pictures in Appendix 3 show earlier walls in the cellar of no 56, now the building next to the railway cutting on the East side of the street (right-hand side if walking out of Sutton towards Mere Green).

The house demolished for the railway was no. 58 and just beyond it the old **Tithe Barn**, in use by the nineteenth century as a malthouse, was also demolished. The Barn is confirmed by Lea (2010b) as having been built by Vesey for the then Rector of Holy Trinity (presumably Ralph Wendon, Rector from 1527 to 1563) for storage of crops tithed to him. When Vesey had it built he had mediaeval carved stones from the former manor house in Maney fitted to the north gable end of the Barn. As a barn this could not equate in layout to the Vesey residential houses, but it is an important structure which is co-eval with those dwellings.

In similar contention is the **Old Grammar School** on the hill near to Holy Trinity Church. A recent examination by Kerry Osbourne (2023) confirms two separate buildings existed, a hall and a house, though sources have been muddled about this over the centuries. Its relevance to this article is the debate springing from a remaining picture from the Aylesford Collection always described as being of the Hall before its demolition in 1832. Kerry

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<sup>4</sup> Email information from K Osbourne quoting Bedford (1891) and Lea, *History Spot* 398 (22/1/2016)



Osborne shows quite clearly that the picture is of the House, the provenance of both buildings and their definitive positions on the Hill. The original Hall was built before the time of Bishop Vesey (it was certainly owned by the Duke of Clarence on his death in 1478) and was situated on the corner of Trinity Hill and Coleshill Street. Osbourne identifies two further school buildings in addition to St Mary's Hall and St Mary's House, one off Blind Lane and the other off Mill Street. He goes on to state:

"At least one of these two buildings, unlike St Mary's Hall, was built by Bishop Vesey as one of his stone houses some time in the 1520s or 1530s." (Osborne, 2023, p7)

Two further buildings have been suggested as potentially incorporating elements from a 16<sup>th</sup> century cottage which show characteristics of the Vesey stone houses. These are the public house currently known as *The Quill and Taper* and the house at 147 Lichfield Road known as the lodge to Four Oaks Hall (still standing though the nearby dower house was demolished c1977).

"The Quill and Taper" was until a refurbishment in 2022 known from its building in the 1970s as "Blake's Barn". Much earlier it was believed to be called "The Black Cock". Roger Lea's article about the building's earlier history entitled "Wesleyan Blake's Barn" does not suggest this, but the picture of the pub shows a smaller cottage-like building on the left whose windows, chimney and general size give it the feel of a Vesey house. An article released as part of an advertisement feature by Banks' Brewery when Blake's Barn opened state that the building replaced barns which had disappeared, as follows:

"The Blake Barn Inn is on the site of an original set of 18<sup>th</sup> century barns which only disappeared from the local landscape in recent years. In order to restore that loss, the new pub has been created to have the look and atmosphere of a traditional barn with an overall open-plan design which has been cleverly subdivided into intimate arched alcoves featuring a mixture of antique and rustic fittings. There is no sham or plastic imitation in these fittings." (Anon, 1984)

The article goes on to explain that authentic bric-a-brac items were secured by the interior designer, including a 50-year-old plough and 2 haywains from 80 years earlier.

It has now been confirmed (July 2024) with staff at the current pub, that this was always a separate building from the cottage which remains in situ beside **Blake Street** as opposed to the main entrance of the pub on Shelley Drive. Confusion has arisen in that the cottage had the pub's name on the side when the pub was known as Blake's Barn. This was purely to advertise it from Blake Street. The older building was not a pub when Blake's Barn was built in 1984 to serve the new housing estate around it.

Another piece of the jigsaw is that there is no mention of any earlier pub on the site, yet it has been said that The Blake Barn Inn replaced an earlier pub named "The Black Cock". The only references to this name are a pub in Walsall Wood and a reference in a professional journal to the building of a railway embankment of that name on the line to Lichfield via Shenstone just past Blake Street. This would fit with the site of the Blake Barn / Quill and

Taper and begs the question as to why the embankment had that name if there was no pub in the vicinity called that at some stage.

It may now be plausible (and yet to be proved) that the previous pub was the cottage which may have changed use to a private dwelling in a much earlier century.

The house still standing and occupied at **147 Lichfield Road**, was The Lodge to the now demolished Four Oaks Hall. Andy Foster has suggested the older, smaller part of this could be a Vesey house.

The owner was very hospitable to the author and photographs of the front and side of the older building are in Appendix 3. The side view shows the join of old and new and the chimney, which resembles those of the Vesey houses. The front shows a small window now filled in (since window tax days) but the owner said there are no stairs. However, in the author's view, a cupboard-style door in the wall next to the inglenook might well have been the entrance to a spiral staircase to the upper floor.

An interesting discovery in the 1920s was the inglenook, hidden behind a Victorian fireplace. This was described in a short article in *Homes and Gardens* in 1927.

## Conclusion

Piecing together the work of historians across the centuries, it is now possible to see more clearly how some of the 51 stone houses built in Bishop Vesey's time have variously survived intact or met their end or been incorporated into a later building.

We can conclude that seven remain either intact or, in the case of Ashfurlong Hall form a very small part of the current building. Two are known to have been demolished in the 1950s and 1960s (Little Sutton Cottage and The White House).

The house on the corner of Bedford Road and Rectory Road for which photographs exist is a very strong contender for a further house and more research probably needs to be undertaken into the house known as Whitehouse Common Farm as well as the chapel cottage in the New Hall grounds.

It seems plausible that one or more of the houses numbered 1,3,5 etc in Coleshill Steet, showing evidence of being built in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, might have formed part of the 51 Vesey houses, and similarly the larger houses in High Street. Other houses are included where it has not been possible to verify their age, mainly so that all this information is in one place. More were probably built in the town itself (Great Sutton) as well as on the outskirts where the surviving ones are now situated.

No claim is made for definitive conclusions here. What we have is nine buildings (extant or demolished) of which we know their provenance as part of the "fifty-one" and a further

eight which require more research and evidence. There must still be sources confirming the provenance of these (and other) buildings in Sutton Coldfield as being potentially part of this ambitious building programme of the 1520s / 1530s, but it is hoped that this preliminary attempt to pull together both the sources than were available in Chatwin and Harcourt's time with those coming to light in more recent research might jog some memories of individuals whose families had some connection with the houses and kept photographs or records. If this is so the author would be very pleased to hear from them via the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group (SCLHRG) website [www.sclhr.org.uk](http://www.sclhr.org.uk).

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The houses built by Bishop Vesey, though varying in size, are all of one type: they were built with quoins at the angles and with doors and windows of well-dressed stones. These are built into walls consisting of roughly squared stones in fairly even courses, not always constructed with the same care. The inside divisions are made of upright timbers framed into a head and sill with an intermediate horizontal beam, these upright timbers are about 9 in. by 3½ in. thick, placed 15 in. apart, the filling between seems to be of wattle and daub. The floor joists are about 9 in. by 4 in., placed flat and about 15 in. apart, notched into the sides of the beams.

The roofs appear always to have been meant for tiles though none of the existing tiling is ancient. In most, if not all cases, the roof principals and purlins are original; in making the principals the same mistake in construction has been made every time. The collar beam (there is no tie-beam) is mortised and pegged into the principal rafter close to the point where this is deeply cut to receive the end of the purlin, with the result that the principal was much weakened and in every case they have shown signs of failure or have actually split and cracked, and they have had to be propped (Plate IV, fig. 2, and Plate VIII, fig. 2).

A particularly interesting feature about the Vesey houses is the spiral stone staircase; it is always placed in the wall at or near the angle and not far from the doorway. These staircases are reminiscent of the staircase in the bishop's birthplace at Old Moor Hall, but not with the same picturesque feature of the projecting tower. The question is often asked why these houses were built of stone; brick was a luxury at the time and only just beginning to be used. Timber framing took a long time to produce, every piece had to be cut by hand from the tree, which was a laborious business, and there can be little doubt that building with the roughly squared and rubble stone was the cheapest and quickest way of constructing the walls; the dressed stone took some little time to prepare but the use of that material was kept to a minimum.

These houses are very plain in design, so plain that it is not everyone who recognizes that they are medieval buildings: they are, however, a remarkable group and when it is realized that they were meant for people, many of whom before had had to be content with what we should call hovels for their homes, we can begin to appreciate that the bishop was an early pioneer in dealing with the housing problem.



Author: **Roger Lea**Published: 29th May 2015 in the *Sutton Coldfield Observer*

In the fifteenth century most of the houses and cottages in the Sutton area were timber-framed buildings with thatched roofs; perhaps there were a few houses built of cob, known locally as mud houses, but bricks were unheard of. Many of the timber buildings had stone footings, but the only buildings constructed in stone were castles and churches. So when Bishop Vesey returned to his native Sutton Coldfield in the 1520s with an ambitious building programme, why did he not follow the local tradition and use timber-framed structures?

He chose brick for his first building project, following the fashion set by his patron the King at Nonsuch Palace and his friend Cardinal Wolsey at Hampton Court. This was a show house to demonstrate his high rank, a new Moor Hall to replace the old timber-framed one. However, he had often resided in stone buildings, notably Ludlow Castle and the Bishop's palace at Exeter. The sandstone used for buildings in Exeter is exactly the same geologically as the sandstone quarried in Sutton Coldfield and used for the church and other buildings here.

Bishop Vesey is said to have built fifty-one stone houses in Sutton, one surviving example being High Heath Cottage, shown in the accompanying photograph taken in 1940\*. Though varying in size, the houses are all of one type. The corner stones or quoins are properly squared stones, and the stones of the door and window openings are also well finished. The walls are of roughly-finished stones in fairly even courses. The only original window at High Heath Cottage is the small one to the left of the door, and this gives light to another feature of these houses, the spiral stone staircase built into the corner.

High Heath Cottage originally had a single room on the ground floor with only one narrow window, and single rooms of the same dimensions, approximately twenty-one square metres, on the first and second floors. Apart from the staircase, the other innovation for a house of this size was the chimney - upper floors in most houses at the time were impractical because smoke from the fire in the centre of the hall was vented through louvres in the thatch. The Vesey houses all had tiled roofs.

Stone may have been the material of choice, but it was also more practical for a quick large-scale housing scheme. Timber framing took a long time to produce, every piece having to be cut by hand from the tree, a laborious business, so building with the roughly-squared and rubble stone was the cheapest and quickest way of constructing the walls - plenty of timber was still needed for the roof, floors and internal walls. The dressed stone used for the quoins and doorframes took time and skill, but its use was kept to the minimum. The high quality of the stone buildings shows that Bishop Vesey employed skilled masons, no doubt some local men but also probably a master craftsman from Exeter.

Several of the stone houses survive, but none has escaped modification over the centuries, some of them are clad in ivy or hidden behind high hedges, so an old black-and white photo has been used to show the external features of a typical house\*.

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[\*1940 photograph of High Heath is one of the images for High Heath cottage in Appendix 3]

## Appendix 3      House listings

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### Notes

The first section relates to houses confirmed as being part of the 51.

The second section lists houses believed also to be of the time of Vesey and potentially numbered in the original 51 buildings.

Demolished houses are in *italics*.

Each house listing has a table giving brief information about the history and key features, location, any historic building listing, sources of information in the references of this article and relevant images.

## Ashfurlong Hall

General information	Late 18 <sup>th</sup> cent incorporating small early 16 <sup>th</sup> cent house. Sandstone, tiled roofs. 16 <sup>th</sup> cent back block has 1 <sup>st</sup> floor 3-light stone mullion window now blocked.
Listing date and status	18 October 1949 II*
Address / location	Tamworth Road, B75 6JL
Church of England Parish	St James Hill
Sources	Dargue 2017; Lea 2010e, 2014b, 2016b.



Front of Ashfurlong Hall



Remaining Vesey cottage

Above left today.

Right:

*"The Stable Yard showing old buildings. Ashfurlong Hall Sutton Coldfield"*

image by Sir Benjamin Stone c1895



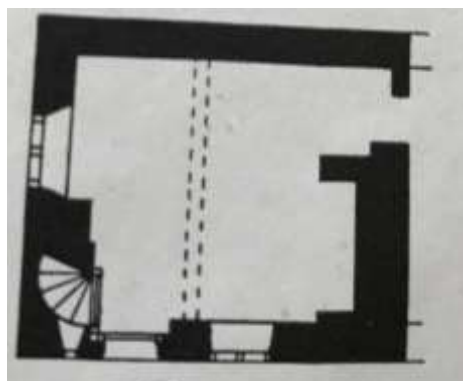
## High Heath Cottage

General information	Smallest of the houses, remaining largely intact. Remote location. Red sandstone rubble, old tiled roof. 2 storeys, casement windows. Stone spiral stairway. Remains of baking oven, blocked original first floor fireplace. Sold at auction Dec 2022.
Listing date and status	17th October 1949 II*
Address / location	Off Withy Hill Road, B75 6JR
Church of England Parish	St James Hill
Sources	Jordan; Chatwin and Harcourt pp13-14; Dargue 2017; Lea 2008a, 2015 (Appendix 2).



1895

1940 →



Floor plan

2022 →

LOT 131
High Heath Cottage, Withy Hill Road, Sutton Coldfield, B75 6JR
\*GUIDE PRICE £1,000,000

A VACANT FREEHOLD GRADE II\* LISTED COTTAGE IN DISREPAIR CONSTRUCTED IN THE 1530S BY BISHOP VESEY, WHICH MAY BE SUITABLE FOR DEVELOPMENT, SUBJECT TO THE RELEVANT POLICIES AND CONSENTS



## Little Sutton Cottage, Little Sutton Road

General Information	Demolished 1957/8 to make way for the Heathcote Estate
Address / location	Little Sutton village
Sources	Jordan; Chatwin and Harcourt pp13-14; Dargue 2017; Lea 2008b.

1890s

1940



Source: Midgley



Source:

Chatwin and Harcourt

**Cottage Too Costly to Preserve**

The Minister of Housing and Local Government has told Warwickshire County Council that he cannot make an order for the preservation of Vesey Stone Cottage, Sutton Coldfield, as a place of historic interest. It is considered too expensive to preserve.

**Vesey Cottage may go**

**E**IGHT of the original 51 cottages built in the 16th century by Bishop Vesey to house poor people at Sutton Coldfield still remain. They are all occupied, but soon there may be only seven.

The town council on Wednesday accepted the Ministry's decision that a preservation order should not be made for the Vesey stone cottage in Little Sutton Road, because it is in a dangerous condition.

An order for demolition will be stopped if a purchaser is willing to improve the property.

Cuttings: Birmingham Post, May and August 1956

## ATTEMPT TO SAVE VESEY COTTAGE

### £300 Offer by Business Man

Four Sutton Coldfield business men are attempting to save a 16th century Vesey cottage due for demolition as a result of the Ministry of Housing's refusal to make a preservation order.

The cottage in Little Sutton Road is one of 51 stone houses built by Bishop Vesey at Sutton between 1519 and 1550. Only eight now remain.

The borough council was informed in January that the cottage owners wished to demolish it, and the council agreed that a demolition order should only be withheld if a prospective purchaser was prepared to improve its condition.

### Owners 'Not Interested'

One of the four business men is Coun. H. Herringshaw, managing director of a Birmingham steel company, who said last night: "We offered £300 for the cottage but the owners told us that they were not interested. The cottage has tenants who are unhappy at the thought of having to move into a council house.

"It is so easy to knock down the old and cover the ground with new red brick kennel-like structures that one finds in the district. Here is a bit of real old England and it should be preserved."

When making his plea at a council meeting, he was told: "Buy it yourself if you want to save it." A builder had said repairs would cost £600.

Coun. Herringshaw added: "We are prepared to stand the cost but I do not know what will happen now."

## Moor Hall Farm

General Information	Used as the model for the stone houses, being similar in construction and built at the same time. Bishop Vesey was born on the Moor Hall Estate but not in this house; records exist of a house here in 1434. Bishop Vesey built a new Moor Hall to live in, in 1525.
Listing date and status	17 October 1949 II*
Address / location	29 Moor Hall Drive, B75 6LN
Sources	Chatwin and Harcourt pp9-10; Dargue 2017; Lea 2013, 2014a.



Above – 1910 – front

Below: 1940 - rear





## Vesey Cottage, Maney Hill Road

General Information	Largest of the remaining houses. Owned by neighbouring St Peter's church as a residence for the verger, presumably since the church's construction in 1905. The Council offered to purchase in 1956 (see cutting below). Now in private hands.
Listing date and status	II
Address / location	4 Maney Hill Road, B75 6JR
Church of England Parish	St Peter's, Maney
Sources	Jordan; Chatwin and Harcourt pp10-11; Dargue 2017; Lea 2012c, 2017a.



Exterior



Attic  
VESEY HOUSE, MANEY

1940s

Today →

**Council to Buy Vesey Cottage**

Sutton Coldfield Borough Council is negotiating for the purchase of one of the eight remaining stone cottages built by Bishop Vesey in the 16th century.

It belongs to St. Peter's Church, Maney, and is occupied by the verger. The Borough Surveyor, Mr. T. Porter, said last night: "The council felt the town should own one of the cottages and I am negotiating for its purchase."

All the Vesey cottages are privately owned, including the one in Little Sutton Road which is due for demolition unless it is put into good condition. With this end in view Coun. H. Herringshaw and three other businessmen have offered £300 to the owners. Streathers, Ltd., builders, but they refuse to sell.

Mr. G. Streather said: "We would put our hands in our own pockets if the cottage was worth saving."



## Vesey Grange

General information	Late 18 <sup>th</sup> cent incorporating small early 16 <sup>th</sup> cent house. Sandstone, tiled roofs. 16 <sup>th</sup> cent back block has 1 <sup>st</sup> floor 3-light stone mullion window now blocked. Now a large six-bedroom house standing in some 2½ hectares of grounds. Includes the original spiral and oak staircases.
Listing date and status	26 August 1976 II*
Address / location	Weeford Road (by Slade Rd junction) B75 5RN
Sources	Dargue 2017; Lea 2014c, 2014d.



Above: today

Left: 1920

Birmingham Daily Post 13<sup>th</sup> Aug 1960

### 16th-CENTURY GRANGE TO BE LET

Vesey Grange, Sutton Coldfield, one of the seven remaining houses built by Bishop Vesey in the sixteenth century, is to be let by its owners, Sutton Coldfield Municipal Charity Trustees.

The house, one of 51 built by Bishop Vesey, is scheduled as a building of historic interest. It has been greatly modernised but still retains its stone spiral staircase, a feature of the Vesey houses.

Vesey Grange stands in about an acre of garden and has six bedrooms and two reception rooms. It is to be let on a seven-year full repairing lease at not less than £300 a year.



## Vesey House / Fordkeeper's Cottage

General information	On the edge of the Newhall Estate, near the Mill. Last sold and renovated 1984.
Listing date and status	18 October 1949 II*
Address / location	Wylde Green Road, B76 1QT
Church of England Parish	
Sources	Dargue 2017; Lea 2010a



The 16th century cottage: a new owner tonight?

### Bishop's cottage to change hands

ONE OF the very few remaining cottages built in Sutton Coldfield by Bishop Vesey in the early 16th Century should have a new owner tonight.

The cottage — named after the bishop — in Wylde Green Road was being auctioned by estate agents Slater Dann at their Sutton Coldfield office.

Slater Dann say that the cottage was once the home of a ford-keeper, who would have guided travellers across the nearby Ebrook on their way between Sutton and Colehill.

The stream was, it seems, at one time treacherous, and as late as the mid 1690s the place near the cottage was one of the few sound crossing spots over Ebrook.

Vesey House, which has beamed ceilings, mullion windows and spiral staircase, is now a building listed for its architectural and historic merit.

The agents say that the present owners have spent a considerable amount of money on updating the kitchen and bathroom, and have added a study and utility room.

Ground floor accommodation includes a sitting room with stone fireplace and oak window seat, dining room and study.

The kitchen has been given a farmhouse-style look with solid oak units and Aga solid fuel cooker, which hosts the domestic water supply.

The main bedroom and split-level bathroom are on the first floor, and two further bedrooms, both with built-in wardrobes, are on the second floor.

There is a range of outbuildings around a paved courtyard, including workshop, and in the gardens, which cover about an acre, are an ornamental pool, vegetable plot, fruit trees and poultry sheds.

The freehold property has a wide frontage and views over open countryside towards Sutton, Penns and Newhall.

Sale -  
1984

**FOR SALE BY AUCTION**

FOR SALE BY AUCTION — THURSDAY, MAY 10, 1984

AT THE OFFICE OF MESSRS. SLATER DANN AND CO., REGENCY HOUSE, SUTTON COLDFIELD AT 6.30 p.m.

(Subject to prior sale and conditions)

A 16TH CENTURY VESLEY COTTAGE OF GREAT CHARM AND LOCAL HISTORIC IMPORTANCE

**'STONE HOUSE', WYLDE GREEN ROAD, SUTTON COLDFIELD**

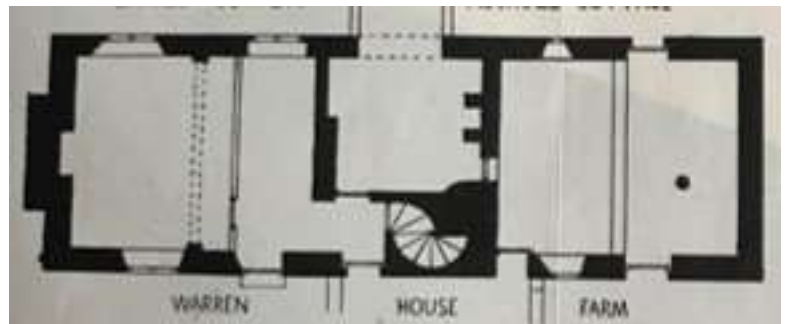
Stone House is one of the few remaining cottages built by Bishop Vesey and features beamed ceilings, mullion windows and spiral staircase. The property is in a delightful rural setting, almost adjoining New Hall and the wooded Walmley escapement and has open aspects to Sutton in one direction and Penns in the other. Set in just under half an acre of ground, surrounded by gardens, the property is approached by a sweeping driveway with ample parking area and the accommodation comprises: Glazed porch entrance, entrance hall, sitting room with open fireplace, lounge with brick fireplace, kitchen with solid fuel Aga cooker, laundry room, first floor: Master bedroom, spacious bathroom, second floor, two further bedrooms, outside: Large range of outbuildings including small garage / store, and excellent timber built workshop or garage, 21 ft. x 30 ft. Interesting gardens.

Viewing: Strictly by prior appointment with the Sale Agents.

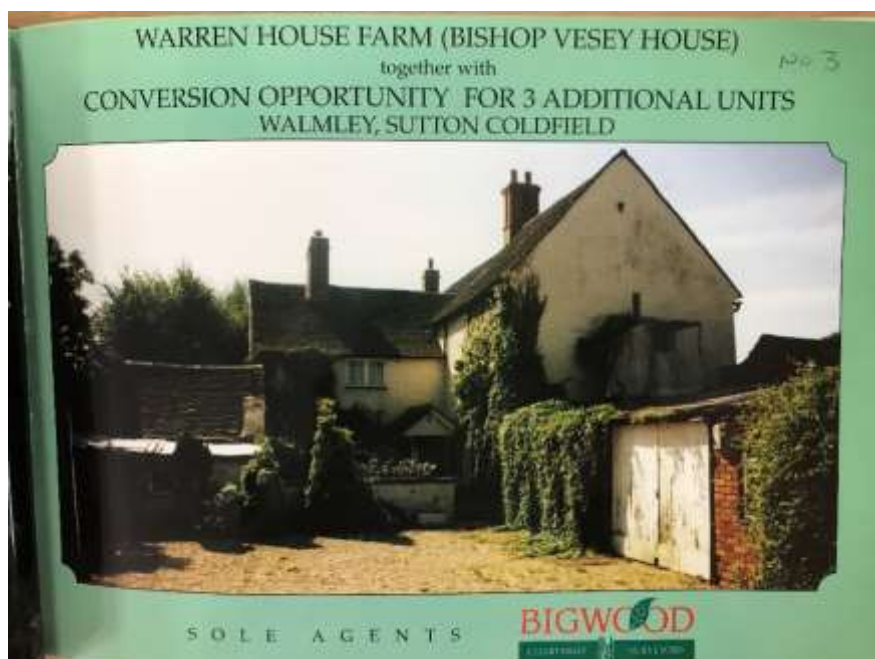
Special and General Conditions of Sale may be inspected at the Auctioneers office on the five days (excluding Saturday and Sunday) immediately before and exclusive of the day of sale.

## Warren House Farm

General information	Has the stone spiral staircase, massive beams and projecting chimney typical of the Bishop Vesey stone houses . Brick wing added in 1671. Near New Hall estate which was purchased 1903 by Walter Wilkinson; he removed the farmyard from New Hall to a new site away from the hall at New Hall Farm and re-allocated the farmland so that the northern half pertained to New Hall Farm and Warren House had the southern half. Farming ended 1990 - part of land given to New Hall Valley Country Park. Housing development took the rest, including refurb of Warren House and conversion of its large barn.
Listing date and status	17 October 1949      II
Address / location	Walmley Road, B76 1NR
Church of England Parish	St John's Walmley
Sources	Dargue 2017; Lea 2012a.



## Chatwin and Harcourt plan





## The White House

General information	Demolished 1965 – now site of Ashfurlong Clinic. Plan below relates to this house though confusingly given the title of Whitehouse Common Farm by Chatwin & Harcourt
Address / location	Tamworth Road, B75 6JL
Sources	Chatwin & Harcourt, p15; Lea, 2012b

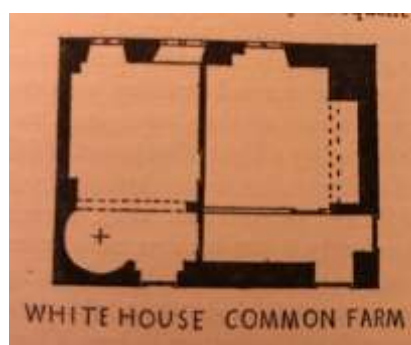


1960s

c1895



Plan below misnamed as the farm



[10]

## 1 - 3 Coleshill Street

General information	Erroneously described as a former rectory of Holy Trinity church. Used for weaving at later date. Of age of Vesey's time but not conclusively proved to be part of the 51
Listing date and status	26 <sup>th</sup> August 1976 II (no.1) 18 <sup>th</sup> October 1949 II (no. 3)
Address / location	Coleshill Street, B72 1SH
Church of England Parish	Holy Trinity
Sources	Fentiman; Lea 2010c

2000s



1990s

1890



## 147 Lichfield Road

General information	Part of "The Lodge", originally to Four Oaks Hall, near the site of the now demolished Dower House of the Hall. Main house known to be c18th century, but earlier building has features of a Vesey house.
Listing date and status	
Address / location	Lichfield Road, B74 2RY
Church of England Parish	Holy Trinity
Sources	Andy Foster, Felicity Clarke



Cottage side view showing join to newer house



Cottage front view with bricked up window

Interior – inglenook and cupboard door to left (possibly a former spiral staircase?)





## Bedford Rd / Rectory Rd corner

General information	Opposite former Rectory in Rectory Park (currently near The Boot Inn) Demolished 1950s
Address / location	Rectory Rd / Bedford Rd corner
Church of England Parish	Holy Trinity
Sources	WKR Bedford; Pritchard (below)



Source: Norman G Evans

Below: SC News 15 July 1994

# Stone house could have been a Vesey

THIS old stone house (below) used to stand on the corner of Bedford Road and Rectory Road, in Sutton Coldfield, and was demolished around the 1950s.

Opinion is divided as to whether it is one of the original 51 stone houses built by Bishop Vesey in the 16th Century.

It is certainly ancient, the roof ridge is irregular, a feature of very old buildings as early builders did not use a beam to support the ridge.

The other Vesey houses also had chimneys on both sides but this one has it in the middle. This could be due to alterations.

The stone was cut into blocks for this house, which is rarely seen in any of the other Vesey houses.

The Rev W K R Bedford mentions the



houses in his book *The Real Vesey*, a copy of which is in the local studies department of Sutton Coldfield Library.

The village of Sutton stood apart from main roads; it had neither trade nor extraordinary natural advantages to give hope of employment to a population; its houses were empty and falling down.

It was Vesey's task to create the place anew.

In furtherance of this purpose he had to think

of employment for the people, and security for those who might resort to, or pass within the precincts of, the town and manor, a charter for the privileges of which he proposed to obtain.

The first object, then, in the erection of these new houses, was the introduction of the weaving trade – the manufacture of the stuff called 'Kersey', with which he was already familiar in Devonshire.

We shall find this purpose indicated in many of the houses by a window, the breadth of which in some cases doubles, in all materially exceeds, the height.

The houses of the hand-loom weavers in Spitalfields, Coventry, or Nottingham, will afford abundance of similar examples, and such a cottage as the one to the north of the road by the rectory gate furnishes a good illustration of the adoption of this peculiar feature by the builder.

'The Archaeology of Birmingham' and Sutton Coldfield is the subject of a talk by Dr Mike Hodder, the city's new field archaeologist, on Wednesday at 7.30pm, in Room 1 at Sutton Library.



## Blake Street

General information	Separate cottage, age not confirmed, but extended probably in nineteenth century. On site of <i>Blakes Barn</i> pub erected 1970s, refurbished and re-named <i>The Quill and Taper</i> in 2022. Some suggest that an earlier pub existed on the site called <i>The Black Cock</i> . No evidence that it was this building, nor for the pub's existence except mention of an embankment of that name in article below about the construction of the railway line.
Address / location	Blake Street. Part of site of <i>Quill and Taper</i> pub in Shelley Drive
Sources	Lea 2012b; <i>Quill and Taper</i> staff

The building advertising Blake's Barn pub in 2016

Below: The same building in 2024



ing close to the park and racecourse. At this point the Mere Pool cutting—the principal cutting on the line—is entered. The cutting is about 1 mile 7 chains in length, and its greatest depth is about 40ft. From it have been taken about 400,000 cubic yds, or about 600,000 tons of earth, of which 120,000 cubic yds., or 180,000 tons, have been used for building the **Black Cock** embankment, the other great engineering work of the line, while the excavation has also furnished material for the embankments further on towards Lichfield. The line proceeds in a northerly direction till it reaches the road which is called Blake-street, and which here forms the boundary between Warwickshire and Staffordshire. At this point, which is 3 miles 22 chains from Sutton, there will be a station to which the name of Blake-street will be given. The next stage of the line passes over the **Black Cock** embankment about three-quarters of a mile long, through another cutting, and then over a series of minor embankments to **Shenstone**, which will be the principal intermediate station. In this neighbourhood most expensive works have been necessary on account of the boggy nature of the land, and its liability to floods. At some points the peat has been dug out to the extent of 6ft., and dry material substituted, in order to secure firm footings for the embankments. An immense number of flood-arches have also been constructed, the set at the **Shenstone** station comprising thirteen, and forming quite a viaduct.

Right: Article from *Building News*

3 June 1884, p 932

(Engineering notes)



## High Street houses

General information	See below.
Listing date and status	N/A
Address / location	High Street, B72 1XP
Church of England Parish	Holy Trinity
Sources	Lea, 2010d

### No. 1 (West side)

A house on the site can be traced back to 1581, when it was known as the White Hart Inn. ... The part of the present building which was thought to date back to 1581 is the range fronting the High Street, which has three main rooms on each floor, including the attic, each room being the full depth of the house. This building originally had stone walls, most of them still in place, though hidden behind later brick walls. The stone is the local sandstone, and the construction method and some details of the chimneys and timbers are similar to those found in the Bishop Vesey stone houses.



### No. 56 (East side, now adjacent to railway cutting)

Currently the premises of Bissell and Brown, this property was the 'mirror image' design of no. 58. While the façade is clearly Georgian, there is evidence in the cellar of this building (below) of earlier stonework which could be from Vesey's time. It is thought not illogical that Vesey would have built some of the 51 houses in the Town main street as well as on the outskirts.



### No. 58 (right) (demolished to make way for railway)

(see also Tithe Barn)





## New Hall chapel

General information	<p>VCH has:</p> <p>“North-east of the house, just outside the moat, is a two-storied building, about 25 ft. by 18 ft., with walls of scabbled squared rubble. It has been used as a stable, but the sizes of the windows suggest that it was built in the 17th century for other uses—possibly a chapel. The east window is of three square-headed lights—two blocked—and above it is an old taller window of two lights. The stone doorway in the middle of the south side has a segmental arched lintel and a range of four dwarf lights over it. Both doorway and head-lights are blocked with 18th-century brickwork. The north wall had also three bull's-eye windows over the long manger, now walled up.”</p> <p>Historic England quotes this as follows:</p> <p>“C17. Scabbled squared rubble, tiled roof. 2 storeys, stone mullioned lattice casement windows. New Hall. "The Chapel", Former Coach House and Stables. Gardener's Cottage and Gatepiers form a group.”</p>
Listing date and status	II 26 <sup>th</sup> Aug 1976
Address / location	Walmley Road
Sources	Victoria County History (VCH), IV, p 230



## Old Grammar School

General information	Demolished. Shows style of Vesey houses. Some confusion has arisen with an earlier building, St Mary's Hall, owned by the Duke of Clarence in 1478, and on the corner of Trinity Hill and Coleshill St, and a further distinct building called St Mary's House.
Address / location	Holy Trinity grounds, top of church hill
Church of England Parish	Holy Trinity
Source	Osbourne, 2023



Kerry Osbourne writes in his email of June 2024: “the Old Grammar School, which is probably one of Vesey’s 51 stone houses ... is the building in the painting.”.

## Tithe Barn

General information	Possibly built as barn / grain store by Bishop Vesey for Rector of Holy Trinity for collection of tithes. Carvings moved from 12 <sup>th</sup> cent Manor House here, then after demolition to Holy Trinity churchyard. Demolished 1870 to make way for railway. 'Anon' has potential use as winter residence for Vesey and notes different carvings
Address	High Street (qv) (beyond no.58 – also demolished for railway)
	Anon 1844; Lea, 2010b, 2011



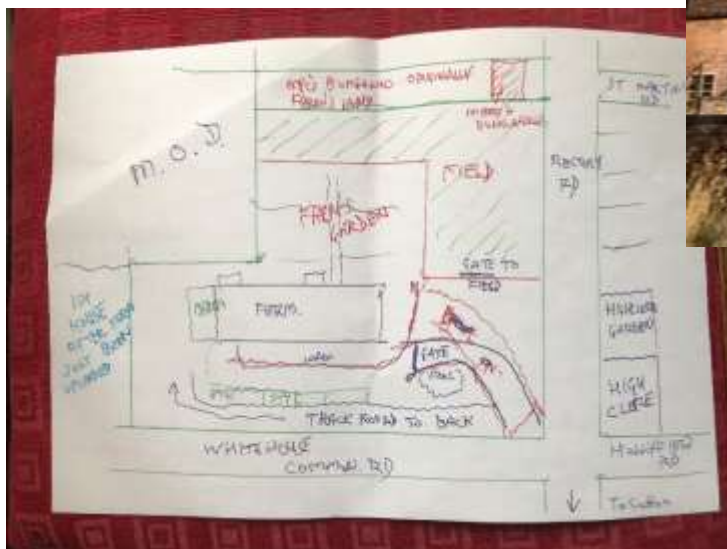
Carved stones (detail)





## Whitehouse Common Farm

General information	Demolished 1957. Land sold to builders called Dare. VCH has: "White House Farm, at the crossing of Rectory Road and Whitehouse Common Road, is a 17th-century farm-house with red sandstone rubble walls, facing west; at the back are a few original stone windows."
Address / location	Whitehouse Common Rd / Rectory Road corner, B75
Church of England Parish	St Chad's, Hollyfield Rd
Sources	Victoria County History (VCH), IV, p 233 Chatwin and Harcourt p16; Glover family members (Peter Glover and Richard Marriott)



Site plan (left) and house plan below

(drawn by Richard Marriott in 2023 from memory)

Below – rear of Farm c1931

