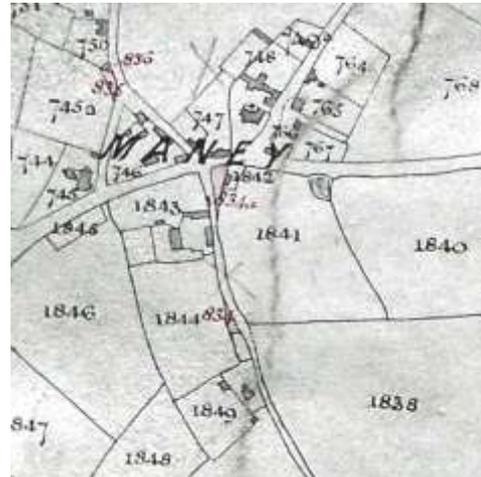


# ***Bridlemere, Maney Hill Road***

by Janet Jordan

Perhaps it was because the Sutton Coldfield engine didn't arrive in time<sup>(1)</sup>, or there could have been a shortage of water, or maybe there was no-one around to assist with the buckets. For whatever reason, a fire managed to engulf Mrs Reynolds' shop in Maney Hill Lane on 12 July, 1869.<sup>(2)</sup> Had it been put out, the future of her family and the outcome of this story of ***Bridlemere*** would undoubtedly have taken a different path.

The shop, or, more likely, workshop, was part of a small cluster of buildings that could be found in the early 1800s in rural Maney, about 250 yards down the lane which began opposite the old Smithy and then meandered its way into Walmley. You can see the site on the 1824 Corn Rent Map. There was another workshop nearby, both of them on the eastern boundary of Plot 1849. To their right and set back from the lane was a large building.<sup>(3)</sup>



1. *Corn Rent Map 1824*

Today, all that remains on the ground is a pair of semi-detached houses, now known as Nos 20 and 22, Maney Hill Road, depicted at the centre of this fine pen and ink drawing.<sup>(4)</sup>



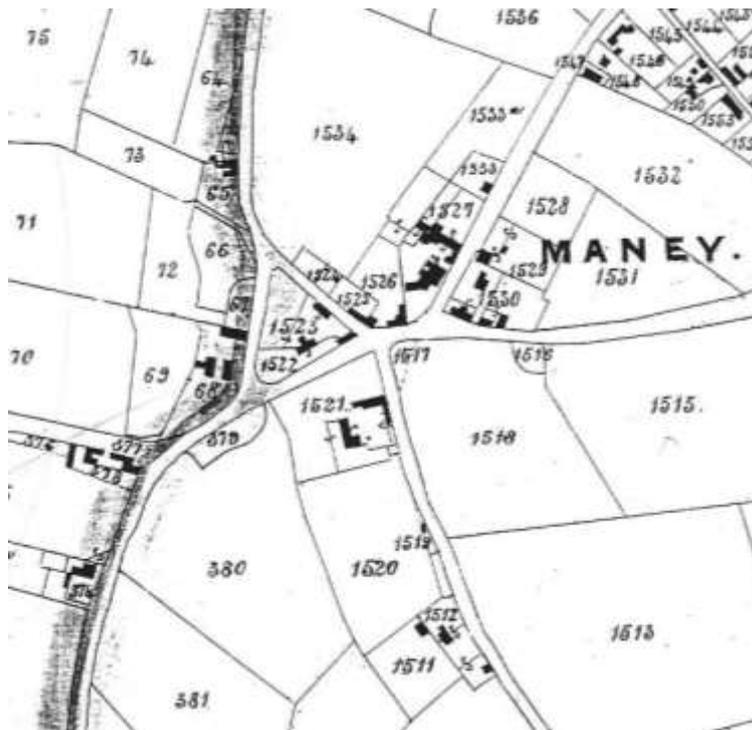
2. *'St Peter's Church from Maney Hill Road' (showing Nos 20 & 22 in the centre)*

So why did the burning of the workshop have such a big impact? We need to go back to 1810, when a house (and presumably the aforementioned workshops) are said to have been built on the site. In fact, this would have been an ideal position to set up a business, surrounded as it was by farms and close to the main route through Sutton. Here, any prospective landlord could soon find himself a tenant.

The Schedule to the 1824 Corn Rent Map shows the property to be owned by Reverend James Scott. At that time, he had found two tenants, each renting a shop and garden measuring 2 rods and 19 perches. Joseph Osbourne was one of them, Thomas Reynolds the other.<sup>(5)</sup>

Joseph was an agricultural labourer and may have worked for Thomas. He had a wife, but no children. Thomas, on the other hand, was a wheelwright. By the time he was 50 in 1841, he and his wife, Elizabeth, had had 6 children and were running a business from the site. Working with him as wheelwrights and blacksmiths were three of his sons, Thomas, Joseph and John.<sup>(6)</sup> Unfortunately, by 1851 he had died. Elizabeth carried on, a farmer by trade and head of the household. Joseph, her son, now married to Martha, was also in business as a local wheelwright.<sup>(7)</sup>

The Parochial Valuation Map and Schedule of 1857 shows Robert Wellbeloved Scott to be the new owner of the site, now referred to as Plots No. 1511 and 1512.



3. Parochial Valuation Map 1857

George Bodington was his tenant and he, in turn, had two sub-tenants of the house and garden - Joseph Reynolds, who seems to have taken over from his mother Elizabeth, and William Tooth. Joseph was using the big field or croft (Plot 1511) for arable farming with one small building on it which, perhaps, was used as a farm shop or smithy. The two men had an unequal share of the house, with Joseph having the larger portion.<sup>(8)</sup>

William died in 1860, leaving Joseph recorded in the 1861 Census as the only tenant, with possibly far reaching consequences. At the time, Joseph had two

apprentices and a servant. His wife Martha, was busy producing children (the final total being eight), so the house must have been large enough to accommodate them all.<sup>(9)</sup> By 1866 he was listed in the Sutton Coldfield Directory as an established wheelwright.<sup>(10)</sup> It didn't last. Maybe work was hard to come by; money certainly seemed to be in short supply. Sad to say, the London Gazette of 30th August 1867 reported:-

### **Bankrupts to surrender in the County.**

*Reynolds, Joseph, late of Maney, Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, wheelwright.  
September 20th.<sup>(11)</sup>*

Thankfully he was discharged, according to Perry's Bankrupt Gazette of 7 December 1867.<sup>(12)</sup>

It is not clear if he was able to continue running his business, but the dreadful situation must have taken its toll for, on 15 April 1869, Joseph passed away at the young age of 48.<sup>(13)</sup>

Martha was now a widow with 6 children under 15 to provide for. So when, three months after her husband's death, she watched as her shop burnt down, it must have been the last straw. Such was her plight that the kind people of Sutton raised a subscription to help her out.<sup>(2)</sup>

We don't know what Martha's shop had been used for. Perhaps it was the base for the wheelwright's business. Perhaps it was used to store produce from the field for sale. It certainly looks as if it provided some vital income and could well have been essential for payment of the rent. Whatever it was, its loss must have forced a change in the family's future prospects.

With so many children, by 1871 Martha was forced to take in laundry.<sup>(14)</sup> Ten years later, in 1881,<sup>(15)</sup> still a laundress, her hands probably ruined from constant washing, she had moved to Ley Hill Cottages, Mere Green, her grown up children no longer with her.

From then on, the years up to 1887 could be classed as the 'the Dark Ages' as far as the house is concerned. There is little to be learned of these times from records. The house could have changed hands many times, it may even have become derelict, but there is nothing to indicate a thriving business with all its attendant noise and bustle.

However, in 1887, the house appears to have come alive again.. This was the year it took on a new identity in the Rate Books.<sup>(16)</sup> **Bridlemere** was born, a name almost certainly given to it by Thomas Griffiths Withers. It definitely reflected his thriving saddlery business in Walsall and also, coincidentally, his surname! It is

said that the Walsall Leather Museum eventually bought the site in Walsall, which at the time belonged to the firm of J. Withers & Son, the family business.<sup>(17)</sup>



#### 4. Ordnance Survey Map 1889

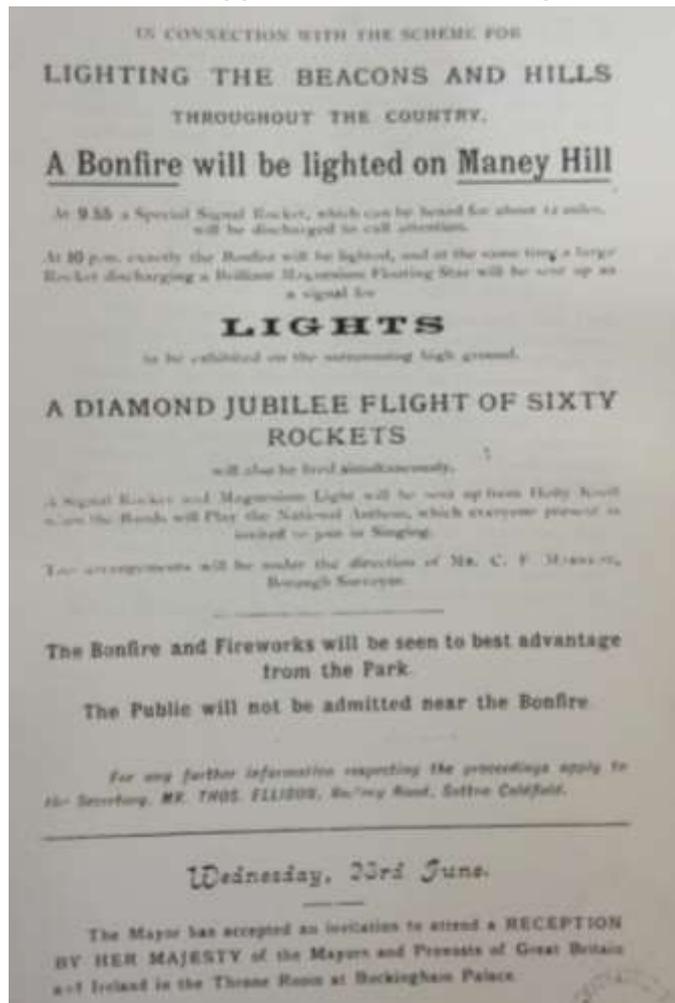
During his occupation, it is interesting to note from the 1889 Ordnance Survey Map that half of the back garden no longer appears as part of the property.

So, no longer wheelwrighting but maybe something to do with horses was carried on or sold from the site. This is all surmise, but horseshoes and bits of thick horse rope are said to have been found in the back garden some years later.

Thomas had a large, dependent, family - a wife and six daughters and, once again, a large house was warranted. Even if they shared a room, several bedrooms would have been required.<sup>(18)</sup> Perhaps, even that didn't suffice for this family, because they did, in fact, move to *Highcroft*, Four Oaks after five years. Alternatively, the incentive to go may have come from the family's religion. Thomas's descendants say that he was originally a Methodist Society Steward in Sutton Coldfield, but records show that, in August 1908, he and his wife attended the Memorial Stone Laying at the new Four Oaks Wesleyan Church, indicating that they had joined a different congregation.<sup>(19)</sup>

When he left, the house retained its name although it does appear to have been empty for a while.<sup>(20)</sup> On 31 July 1893, an advert appeared in the Birmingham Daily Post for a "*Superior Charming Apartment, Bridlemere, Maney Lane, Maney*"<sup>(21)</sup> and it may be that the then owner thought of renting it out piecemeal.

Andrew Bailey may be the man who answered the advert and, as there is no evidence that he had a family, an apartment would have suited him. It was during his period of occupation, from 1895 to 1900, that something rather out of the ordinary happened. On 23 June 1897, late in the evening, a Special Signal Rocket was discharged that could be heard 12 miles away. This signalled the lighting of a bonfire at the top of Maney Hill, and the firing of Sixty Rockets to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. A rare event indeed.<sup>(22)</sup>

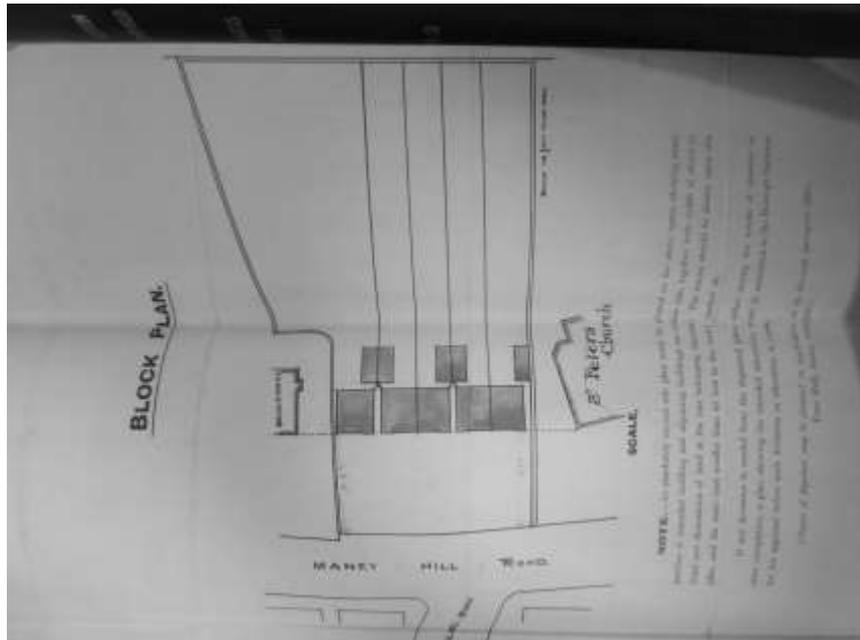


##### 5. *Bonfire on Maney Hill, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee 1897*

Further activity in the area, perhaps less of a surprise, was the building of two semi detached houses to the left hand side of *Bridlemere* in 1898 for Mr Pilkington, a local man.<sup>(23)</sup> This was the beginning of many future changes in Maney Hill.

In 1901, another large family moved in to *Bridlemere*. This time it was Alfred Watson, who had six dependent ladies to consider - wife, sister and daughters. His company, Alfred Watson and Company, carried on business as Electrical Engineers and Electrical Accessories Manufacturers at 180 Hockley Street, Birmingham. The property was obviously ideal for them.<sup>(24)</sup>

Down the lane, near the corner of the Birmingham Road, a beautiful new church, St Peter's, was opened on 28th June 1905, triggering the development of the whole of Maney Hill Lane.<sup>(25)</sup> Between the church and *Bridlemere*, a run of five houses was built in 1911, later referred to as Nos. 18, 16, 14, 12 and 10.



6. Planning Application No.2304 showing left to right Nos. 18, 16, 14, 12 and 10

Initially, these houses only had names; for instance No. 18 was called *Helmsleigh*. That particular house had a rather strange lay-out to its back garden. Unlike its four neighbours, where their gardens ran parallel with one another perpendicularly up the hill behind them, *Helmsleigh's* also extended sideways across part of the rear of *Bridlemere*, virtually doubling its size.<sup>(26)</sup> This extension recently yielded a surprise for the current owner who unearthed an Edwardian mosaic floor there, large enough to be the base of a conservatory or summer house. It is a mystery as to who put it there and why?



7. Mosaic Floor at Helmsleigh (No. 18)

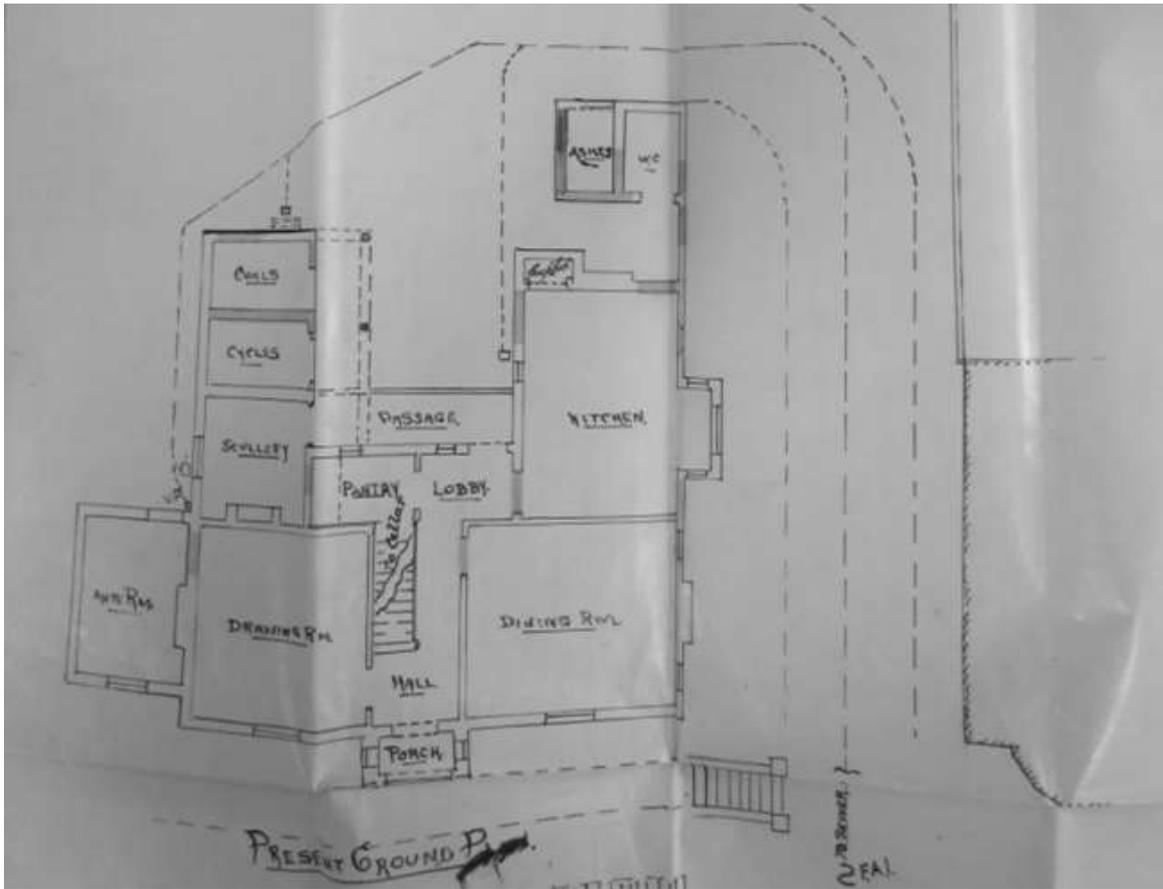
Joseph Franks was occupying *Bridlemere* in 1911 with his New Zealand born wife and grown up family of four children (two of whom were girls, also born in New Zealand).<sup>(27)</sup> Was it a member of this family who, in this newscutting, sent the postcard to Miss L. Milne in Tasmania on October 14, 1910? Their new Humber car looks somewhat out of place in a street where people look quite comfortable walking in the middle of the road!<sup>(28)</sup>



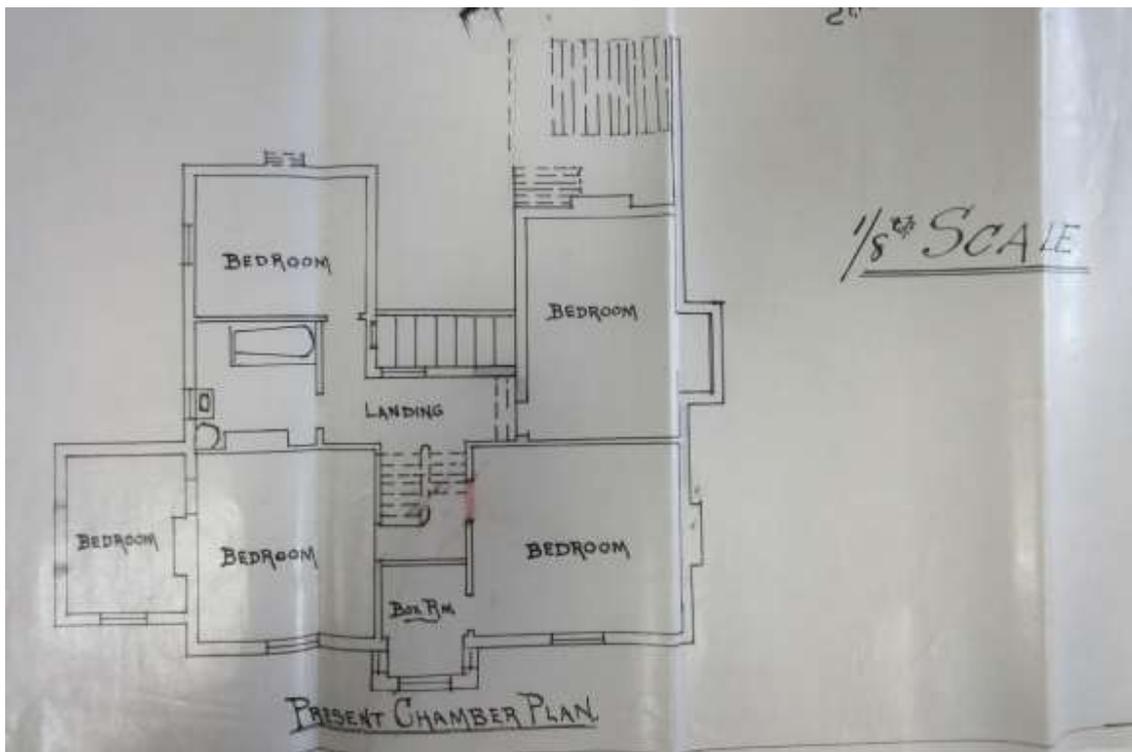
### 8. Maney Hill Road in 1910

During the First World War, it must have been difficult to find families who would take on such a large property and sizes of families were beginning to shrink by then. All this may have sown the seeds of an idea in the mind of local builder, Mr. J.H. Powell, who actually bought the property in 1915. He thought of dividing his house into two and thus put in Planning Application No. 2668 showing how he intended to do the work.<sup>(29)</sup>

As it stood, looking from the road, the building had a large Drawing Room, Hall, Dining Room, Kitchen, Pantry, Lobby, Scullery, Coals, Cycles, W.C., and a Ante-Room to the left on the ground floor. Five Bedrooms, a Box Room and a Bathroom/W.C. occupied the first floor. There was also a cellar.



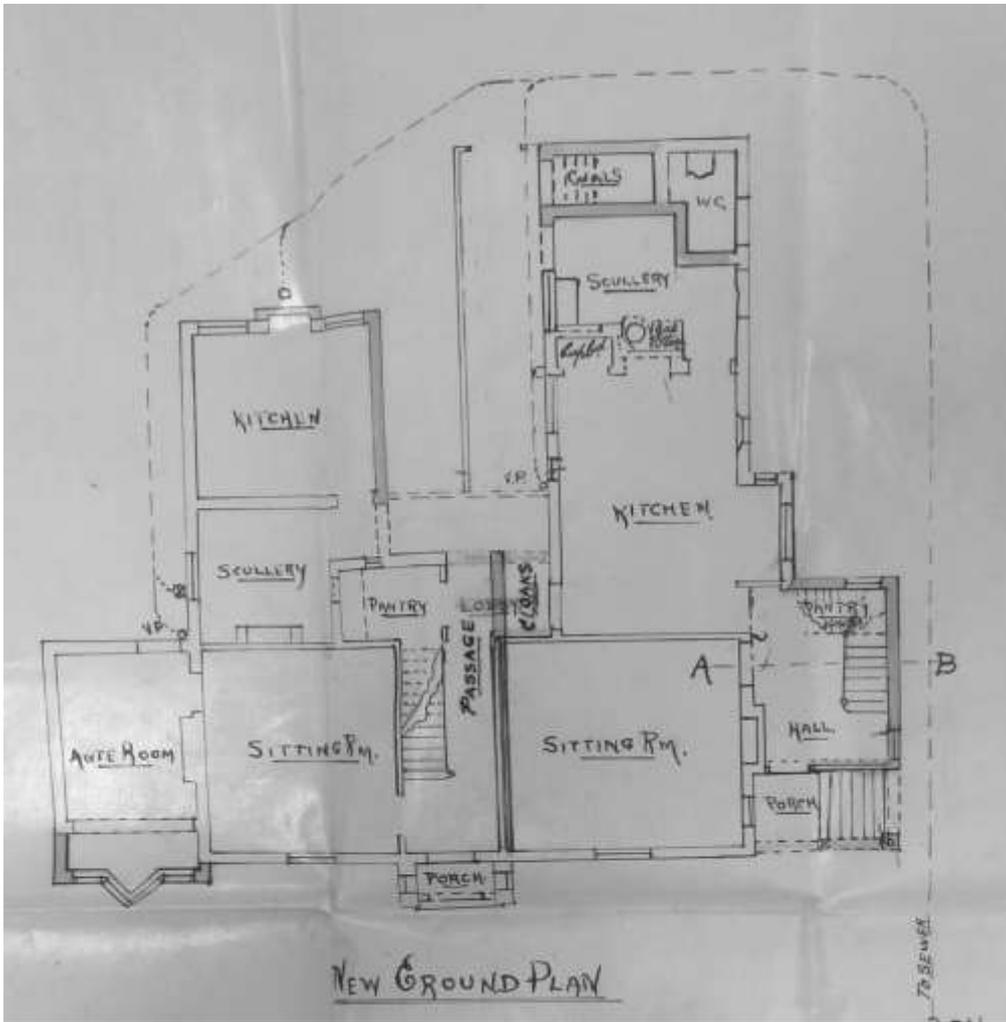
9. Present Ground Plan No. 2668



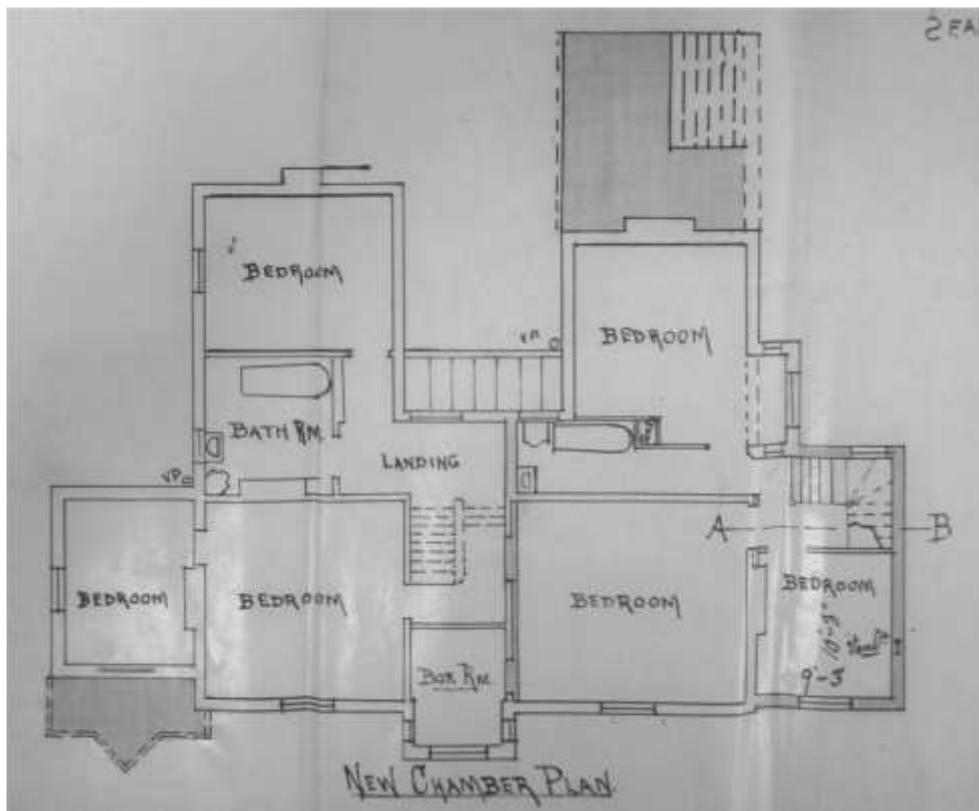


Mr Powell's clever plan proposed to build a two storey extension on the right hand side, enabling an extra staircase to be inserted to give access to the upper floor. Some walls were inserted, some raised, some repositioned, with the result that the left hand side of the property ended up with the Ante-Room, a Sitting Room, Scullery, Pantry and Kitchen on the ground floor, with three of the Bedrooms, the Box Room, Bathroom/WC being upstairs. The right hand property, on the ground floor, had a Sitting Room, Kitchen, Scullery, Cloakroom, Coals and WC, Hall and Porch (both within the new extension) and, upstairs, there were two Bedrooms and Bathroom/W.C. and a further bedroom (also within the new extension).

**11. Two Storey Extension Plan No. 2668**



12. New Ground Plan No. 2668



13. New Chamber Plan No. 2668

The plan was approved and the work was finished in July 1915. The Powells are recorded as living there for the next 5 years, to be followed by Francis William Gardner and his wife, Ethel May Gardner. The name *Bridlemere* continued to be used for the left hand portion of the division, at least until the 1930s when it became No. 22 Maney Hill Road.<sup>(30)</sup>

By far the longest to live there were the Gardner Family, who stayed until the 1960s, followed by the Fewtrells and Bradleys

The other portion of the house became No. 20 and the Hendersons, Nellists, Pecks and Gamblens were some of the long standing tenants over the years. Nowadays, this side has also undergone changes to its interior.



The building today is not easy to photograph, being well hidden by trees, but its past certainly revealed some interesting events.

14. Nos 20 and 22 (formerly *Bridlemere*) in 2015.

#### SOURCES:

- (1) Birmingham Journal Saturday 4 March 1826 ([www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk))
- (2) JORDAN, J., *Diary of Sarah Holbeche* (Ref: BCOLQ942496081HOL Page 143)
- (3) Corn Rent Map, 1824
- (4) GRAY, Tony, '*St Peter's Church from Maney Hill Road*', Pen and Ink Drawing 2015
- (5) Schedule, Corn Rent Map (Ref: BCOLQ333.20942496COR)
- (6) 1841 Census ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (7) 1851 Census ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (8) Parochial Valuation Map and Schedule (Ref: QSH84.9))
- (9) 1861 Census ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (10) 1866 Sutton Coldfield Directory (Ref: SH06SUT)
- (11) London Gazette, 30th August 1867, ([www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk))
- (12) Perry's Bankrupt Gazette, 7 December 1867 ([www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk).)
- (13) Births, Deaths & Marriages ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (14) 1871 Census ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (15) 1881 Census ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (16) Electoral Register 1887
- (17) REDWOOD, Mike ([www.mikeredwood.com/history](http://www.mikeredwood.com/history))
- (18) 1891 Census ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (19) Newscuttings Sutton Coldfield Methodist Churches 1908-88, (Ref:QSH18.3)
- (20) Electoral Register 1892
- (21) Birmingham Daily Post 31 July 1893 ([www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk))
- (22) Victorian Sutton 1838-1900, Item 5, (Ref: BCOLQ942.496SUT)
- (23) Planning Application No. 719 dated 23/9/1898

- (24) 1901 Census, [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk)
- (25) Maney , The History of a Parish, ed. Vicar, Canon Peter Fisher (Ref: BCOL274.2496MAN)
- (26) Planning Application No. 2304 dated 7 June 1911
- (27) 1911 Census ([www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk))
- (28) Newscuttings, Maney, Vol 1 (Ref: QSH71.06)
- (29) Planning Application No. 2668
- (30) Electoral Registers

## **ILLUSTRATIONS**

- 1. Corn Rent Map 1824
- 2. 'St Peter's Church from Maney Hill Road' (Pen and Ink Drawing 2015 by Tony Gray)
- 3. Parochial Valuation Map 1857
- 4. Ordnance Survey Map 1889
- 5. Bonfire on Maney Hill, Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee 1897 (Victorian Sutton 1838-190, Item 5, (Ref: BCOLQ942.496SUT))
- 6. Planning Application No.2304 showing left to right Nos. 18, 16, 14, 12 and 10
- 7. Mosaic Floor at Helmsleigh (No.18) (Photo by Mark Smith)
- 8. Maney Hill Road in 1910 (Newscuttings, Maney, Vol 1 (Ref: QSH71.06))
- 9. Present Ground Plan No. 2668
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- 11. Two Storey Extension, No. 2668
- 12. New Ground Plan, No. 2668
- 13. New Chamber Plan, No. 2668
- 14. Nos 20 and 22 (formerly Bridlemere) in 2015.

*(All sources and illustrations are from Sutton Coldfield Library Local Studies Department and marked with their references, unless otherwise mentioned)*