

Building Record

Ravenslea, 12 Blakebrook, Kidderminster

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Date: 27th March 2009

Historic Kidderminster Project Ref: 247

Introduction

This report was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster project. This is a fine detached house, now called Ravenslea, forming part of Kidderminster's most distinguished street. It is one of three houses built by the noted Kidderminster architect, William Knight, the others being the neighbouring pair numbered 13 and 14 Blakebrook. It is reasonable to presume he designed them. He chose to live in no. 12, and ironically it is the only one of the three houses not to be listed. Resources of both Kidderminster Library and Worcester Record Office have been used to compile this report.

The Origins of Blakebrook

The name 'Blakebrook' derives from the Black Brook which flows from the marshy area on the west side of White Wickets playing field, under Mason Road and behind the house on the east side of the street. The brook formed the old borough boundary, to the west of which common grazing land had stretched for centuries. Habberley Valley and the Devil's Spittleful nature reserve are relics of that landscape. It was gradually enclosed, and this process continued with an Act of Parliament in 1774 and the award of land in the following year. (p72/3, Gilbert, 2004, and WRO BA5278/45) This included the enclosure of Black Brook Common. Most of the land went to the Lord of the Manor, Thomas Foley. It has been said that he 'had little reason to be displeased with the Award'. (See R. L. Downes)

The award was studied by J. D. Schooling, and he identified a road or track where Blakebrook is now laid out. (WRO BA5673) Near the north end were old enclosures called Powneys, out of which a public road led towards High Abberley. Also mentioned is Proud Cross Lane, which probably led out of these same enclosures following a path eastwards into the Borough which is now Mason Road. The award list all the roads and one is described as a 'private wagon and drift road of the breadth of 60 feet out of the public road from the end of Proud Cross Lane into the turnpike from Kidderminster to Bewdley'. (WRO BA10470/140) This was probably the track which became Blakebrook.

Early History of the House

William Knight built Ravenslea around 1830, and the poor rate list of May 1831 has him living there. The lists show that Knight had first built nos. 13 and 14 (now named White Lodge and Hampton House respectively), a unit of two semi-detached houses, by December 1826. (WRO BA4766/3 & 4) He died at his home in Blakebrook in

September 1845 aged 64. (Ten Towns Messenger 26.9.1845) As an architect he had for a time been in partnership with John Nettleship. Among the buildings designed by Knight and Nettleship were the Kidderminster Union Workhouse and Greatfield Hall. (C. D. Gilbert, 2000)



Ravenslea pictured in 2009

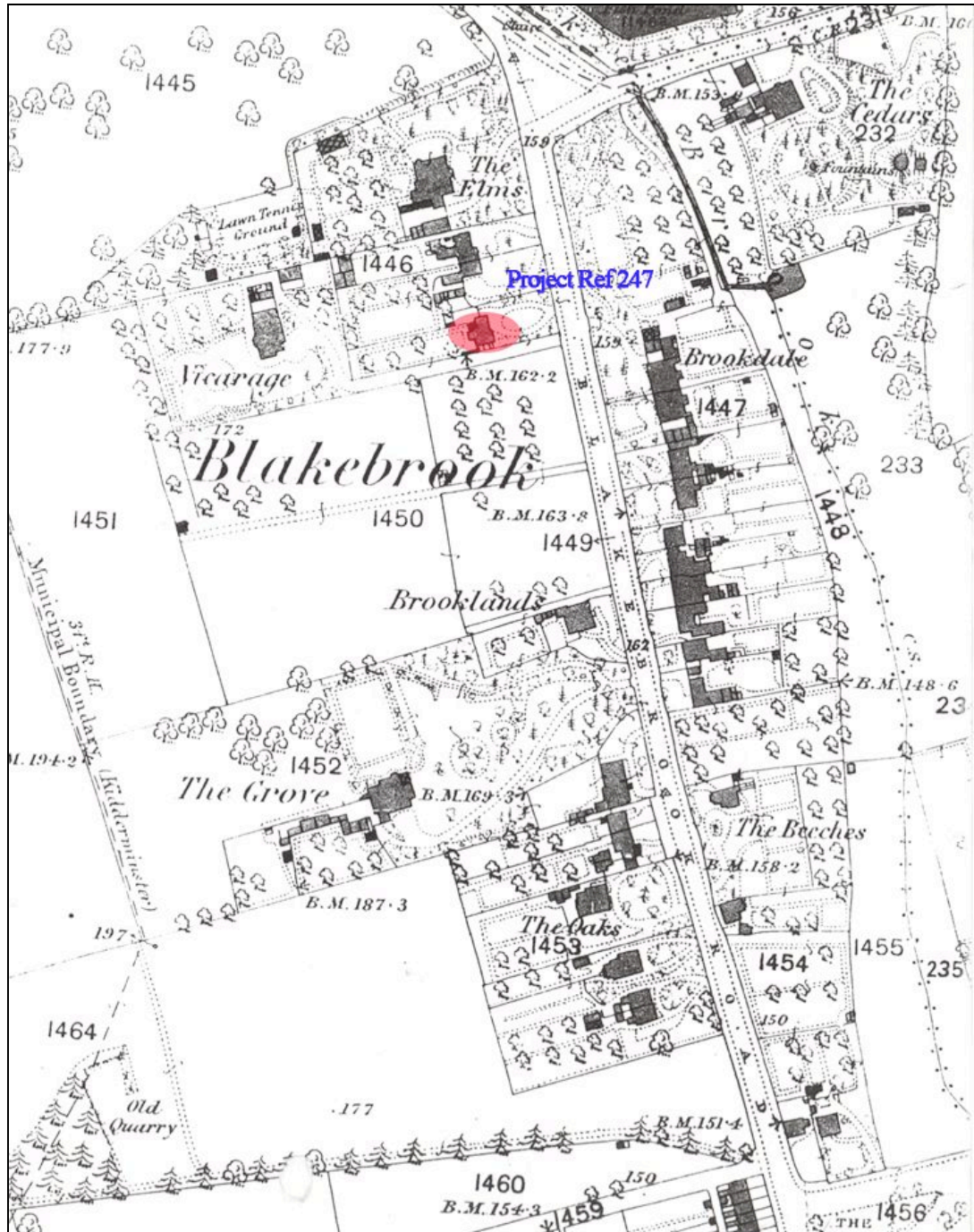
The three houses were purchased by the carpet manufacturer John Sutton Barber. He had lived since at least May 1830 across the road as a tenant at what is now 17 Blakebrook. Barber had come from Walsall where he had been a mercer and a draper. (WRO BA10765/3) Around 1824 he went into partnership with the established carpet manufacturer, James Cole, who was his brother-in-law. (Probate of Benjamin Barber April 1827) He continued to reside at number 17 until his death in December 1850. (Berrows Worcester Journal 26.12.1850) This probably led to the end of the Barber and Cole enterprise, which was not listed in the Billings directory of 1855. Barber was a member of the Church of England fraternity. There is a family vault in St John's churchyard, close to the church on its east side. It is falling into disrepair and the inscriptions are indistinct. It does show that Barber's daughter, Elizabeth, did not outlive him for long and died at the age of 29.

The October 1857 poor rate list shows C.H.S. Leicester at this house. (WRO BA10470/206) In 1855 Billings Charles Leicester is listed as second master of the Grammar School, Blakebrook. The poor rate lists show that the Barber family held on to the property until at least 1887.

Bibliography

R. L. Downes, The Kidderminster Enclosure Award of 1775, available in Kidderminster library.

C. D. Gilbert: William Knight, A Worcestershire Architect – from Transactions of the Worcestershire Archaeological Society, 2000.



Ravenslea and Blakebrook 1885 - OS Ref 821768