

# **Building Record 16 & 17 Blakebrook, Kidderminster**

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## **Historic Kidderminster Project Ref: 250**

### **Introduction**

This report was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. These houses are listed buildings forming part of Kidderminster's most distinguished street. They were built in 1824 by Abel Lea, and, like many of Blakebrook's large houses, they were built for renting by the growing number of wealthy middle class people in the town, many of them being manufacturers. The pair of houses today include Brookdale Nursing Home, which is number 16. They are amongst the grandest of Blakebrook's houses. Resources of both Kidderminster Library and Worcester Record Office have been used. We have also been able to use information from his deeds given us by George Mattocks, present owner of number 18 Blakebrook.



**16 & 17 Blakebrook pictured in 2009**

## **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.



17 Blakebrook in 2009

## **History of number 16 and 17 Blakebrook**

The two houses appear first on the poor rate list of November 1824, showing Abel Lea as the owner and John Lea and John Sutton Barber as the tenants. John Lea was probably the son of John Lea of the Lakes, Franche Road, and a distant relative of Abel Lea. Barber was a carpet manufacturer and was to remain as tenant of what is now number 17 for over 25 years until his death there in December 1850. (Berrows Worcester Journal 26.12.1850) 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) Barber's death probably led to the end of the company, which was not listed in any form 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.



**Rear of 17 Blakebrook in 2008**

Abel Lea was a manufacturer who formed a partnership with his brother Henry and Robert Carmichael in August 1807. (See Lewis, 1959) They made silk and worsted stuffs, including bombazine, a very fine material. By the 1820s this industry was in decline and Lea was diversifying into property. Ultimately he owned a row of seven houses on the east side of Blakebrook, which today are numbered 16-22. In his will dated 1827, Lee described himself as a 'gentleman'. His bother, Henry, was then a 'dealer in carpeting and bombazine'. (Public Record Office, probate December 1838) Lea died in June 1838, aged 62. (Ten Towns Messenger, 30.6.1838)

Lea's will was very long and complex. In a codicil of 1835 he bequeathed the Blakebrook houses upon various trusts to his children. Evidently they were still very young. The codicil reveals that one son, Joseph Henry Lea, was born in 1828, and he was to receive numbers 20, 21 and 22. The houses numbered 18 and 19 were bequeathed to another son Abel Humphreys Lea. At this time Abel would have been about eight years old, because at the 1851 census for the Parish of Stone he was living at Spennells aged 24. Turning to the two houses which are the subject of this report, a daughter, Marianne, was to inherit Brookdale. She was about fifteen years old, being aged 30 at the 1851 census. The other house from the pair, now number 17, was bequeathed to another of his daughters, Elizabeth.

As far as we know, Elizabeth never lived in the house she inherited. She is shown on the poor rate lists as owner from at least 1852 until 1884 with a succession of tenants.

By the time of the 1851 census Marianne and her husband, William Richard Morton, were in residence at her house. Morton was the son of the carpet manufacturer James Morton, who had established a partnership in Kidderminster in 1809 with John Woodward. (p21, Gilbert, 2001) Eventually James took his sons, William and Edward, into partnership. Unfortunately, William died in 1859 aged only 41, predeceasing his father who died the following year. (p86, Jacobs, 1968) For some years Marianne continued to live in their Blakebrook home. She was still shown there by the poor rate list for January 1865. (WRO BA 10470/209) By 1876 John Dixon was tenanting the house. (Post Office Directory) By 1895 Marianne was living with her daughter, Emily, at Cricklade, Wiltshire. (Deeds held by George Mattocks.)

According to the poor rate list of October 1884 the tenant of what is now number 16 was John Stooke. The house was then numbered 14. The Kelly's directory of 1896 showed that he was still there, and the house was numbered 14 and called Brookdale.

### **Description of Number 16 known as "Brookdale"**

We have details of Brookdale when it was for sale c1970. On the ground floor was a Corinthian pillared entrance, inner vestibule, entrance hall with moulded cornice work and cloakroom. There was a lounge with marble fireplace, dining room with marble fireplace, study, breakfast room/kitchen and working kitchen. In the basement was dry brick arched cellarage, comprising cellar number one with a strong room, a small wine cellar, and cellar number two.

On the first floor approached by a cantilevered staircase with mahogany handrail was a toilet, a landing off which were four bedrooms, two having dressing rooms, two bathrooms and a games room. In addition there were an office and a photograph processing room. On the second floor were four further bedrooms.

Outside were a garage for three to four cars, a stable used as a fuel store, a coalhouse, utility room and garden store.

The grounds extended to half an acre. At the front was a winding gravel carriage drive terminating in turning sweep and flanked by mature shaped lawns, rose beds, specimen evergreens and shrubs. The rear garden had a paved terrace, rose pergola,

shaped lawns, terraced rockeries, paved walks, rose beds and ornamental shrubberies, interspersed with choice fruit trees. (WRO BA9526/78)

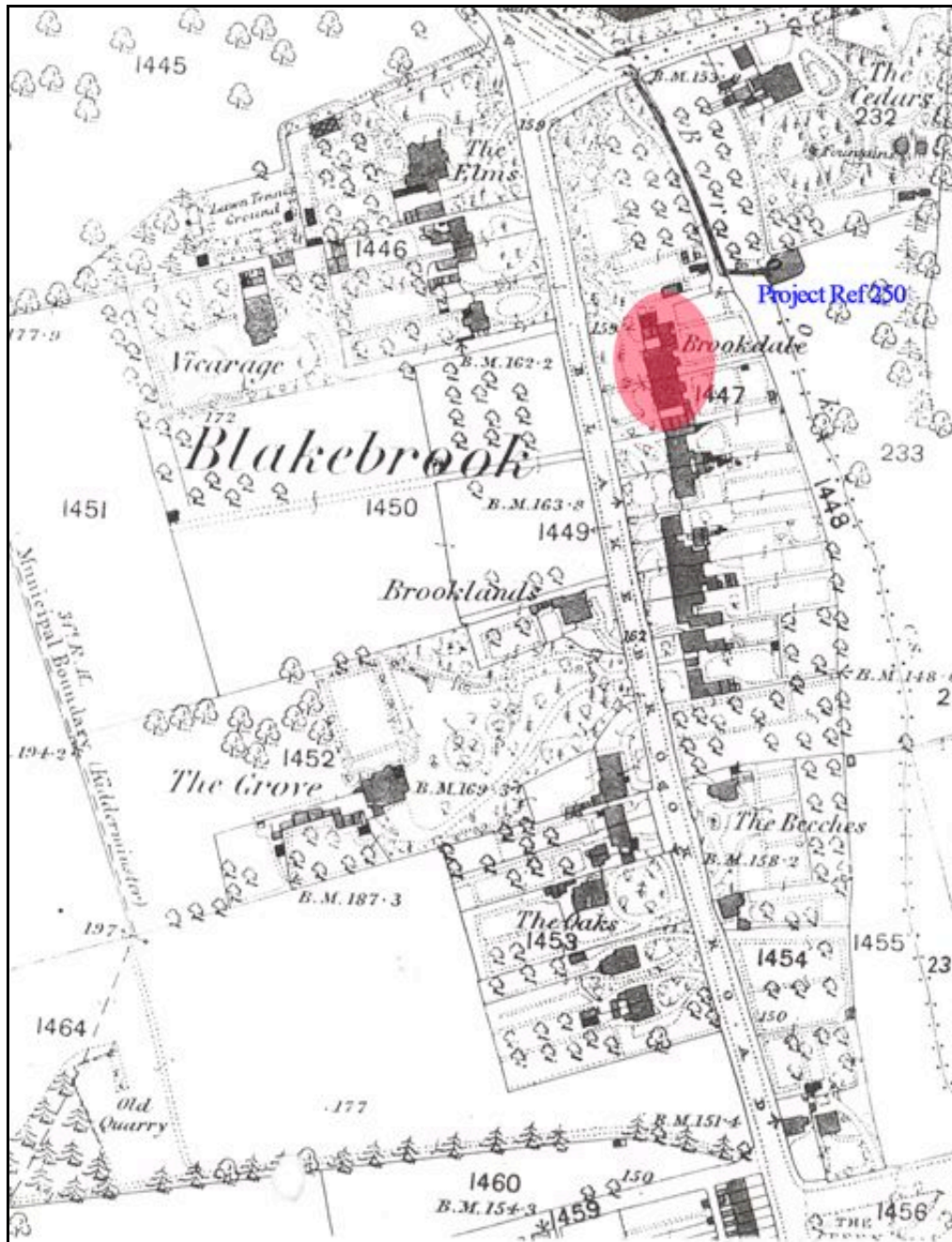
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