

# **Building Record 18 & 19 Blakebrook, Kidderminster**

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## **Historic Kidderminster Project Ref: 251**

### **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 1821 by Blankley Perrins Willis, 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. Together with the neighbouring houses numbered 20 and 21, these are the first major houses in the street. I am grateful to George Mattocks, the present owner of number 18, for his assistance with this report, based on information from his deeds. Resources of both Kidderminster Library and Worcester Record Office have been used.



**Detail of front of 19 Blakebrook in 2008**

## **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.



**19 Blakebrook pictured in 2009**

## **History**

In May 1821 Lord Foley sold a plot of land to Blankley Perrins Willis for £180. (WRO BA10470/91) Willis had various business interests, and a few years later he was to be responsible for the development of Oxford Street. (p87, Gilbert, 2004) By December 1821 he was building the two Blakebrook houses and was mortgaging the property for £350. In April 1824 he sold the completed houses to Abel Lea for £1060.

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. It seems they were still very young. The codicil reveals that one son, Joseph Henry Lea, was born in 1828. The two houses covered by this report were bequeathed to his 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.

The 1835 codicil stated that the tenants of the houses now numbered 18 and 19 were George Crump and Joseph Hiles respectively. They were both carpet manufacturers. Hiles in fact had been the tenant of number 19 from the start.



**Rear of 18 Blakebrook in 2008**

Rev. Abel Lea married Marianne Sophia Townsend in 1866. He died 20<sup>th</sup> October 1872 having no children. His will provided that after his wife's death the two houses passed to his two sisters, Mrs Marianne Morton and Miss Elizabeth Lea. It is believed that his widow, died in 1895. Two deeds dated 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1895 conveyed the interests of the two sisters in five houses (those now numbered 18 to 22 Blakebrook) to the four children of Marianne Morton.

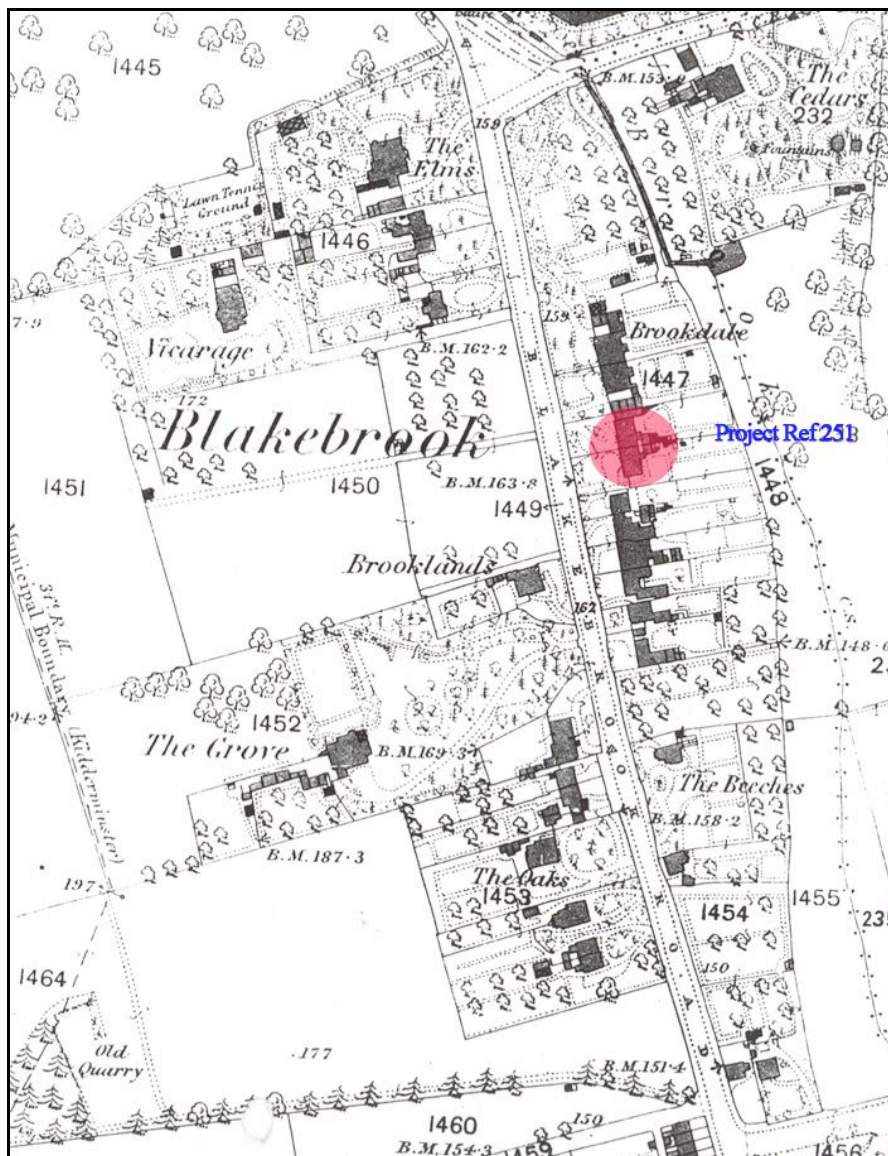
Number 18 and 19 Blakebrook remained in the Morton family until they were sold at auction by Messrs Tovey and Cooper on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1920.

### **Bibliography**

Nigel Gilbert, A History of Kidderminster, 2004.

R. A. Lewis, Kidderminster Stuffs, 1959. (Available in Kidderminster Library.)

R. L. Downes, The Kidderminster Enclosure Award of 1775. (Available in Kidderminster Public Library)



18 & 19 Blakebrook in 1885 - OS Ref 822768