

# **Building Record**

## **The Oaks, 5, Blakebrook, Kidderminster**

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### **Historic Kidderminster Project Ref: 241**

#### **Introduction**

This work was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. The records used were mainly held at Worcester Record Office, but Kidderminster Library resources were also used. Blakebrook is undoubtedly Kidderminster's finest residential street, and it has been designated a conservation area. Many of its buildings are listed, although this one is not. Much of its development took place in the 1820s and this house, known as the Oaks, was built c1827.

#### **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 lists 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 Oaks**

The poor rate list shows that the house had been built by May 1828. (WRO BA4766/3) The owner was John Hooman, who was a builder. His son of the same name was a maltster. Both lived in Dudley Street. (See HKP report 664) The first tenant of the Oaks was the Rev. Robert Ross. He commenced his ministry at Old Meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1827, and he preached his last sermon there in September 1839.

The carpet manufacturer, George Butcher, was a subsequent tenant, being shown on a poor rate list in 1830. (WRO BA4766/4)

It is likely that the Oaks became a school c1835. The words “late Butcher” appeared in the poor rate list of April 1834. Almost certainly an establishment referred to as ‘the Academy’ in an 1836 newspaper article was the Oaks. (Ten Towns Messenger 8.7.36) At the 1841 census Rev. John Clarke, schoolmaster was listed there.

The poor rate lists show that the house continued to be owned by the Hooman family at least until 1852. (WRO BA 10470/203) At the 1851 census it was the home of the widow, Jane Dobson. She is of considerable interest because of her family had been hand loom carpet manufacturers and were related to the pioneer of Kidderminster’s industry, John Pearsall. Mrs Dobson’s son, John Lloyd Dobson, was still listed as a carpet and rug manufacturer in Church Street in 1855. (Billings Directory) The firm did not survive into the power loom era. The family involvement in the industry went back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Timothy Dobson was a manufacturer who died in 1808. His widow, Rebecca, was the daughter of John Pearsall. Their son, James, had 20 hand looms in 1832. (p44, Smith, 1986) He was the husband of Jane and the father of John Lloyd Dobson.



**The Oaks pictured in 2009**

### **Description of The Oaks**

In 1935 it was for sale with the following information on the particulars. On the ground floor were entrance hall, drawing room, morning room, dining room, glazed veranda, kitchen, larder-pantry, scullery and cellar. On the first floor were four bedrooms and bathroom. On the second floor were two good attics. The area of the garden was estimated at three quarters of an acre. (WRO BA9526/52)

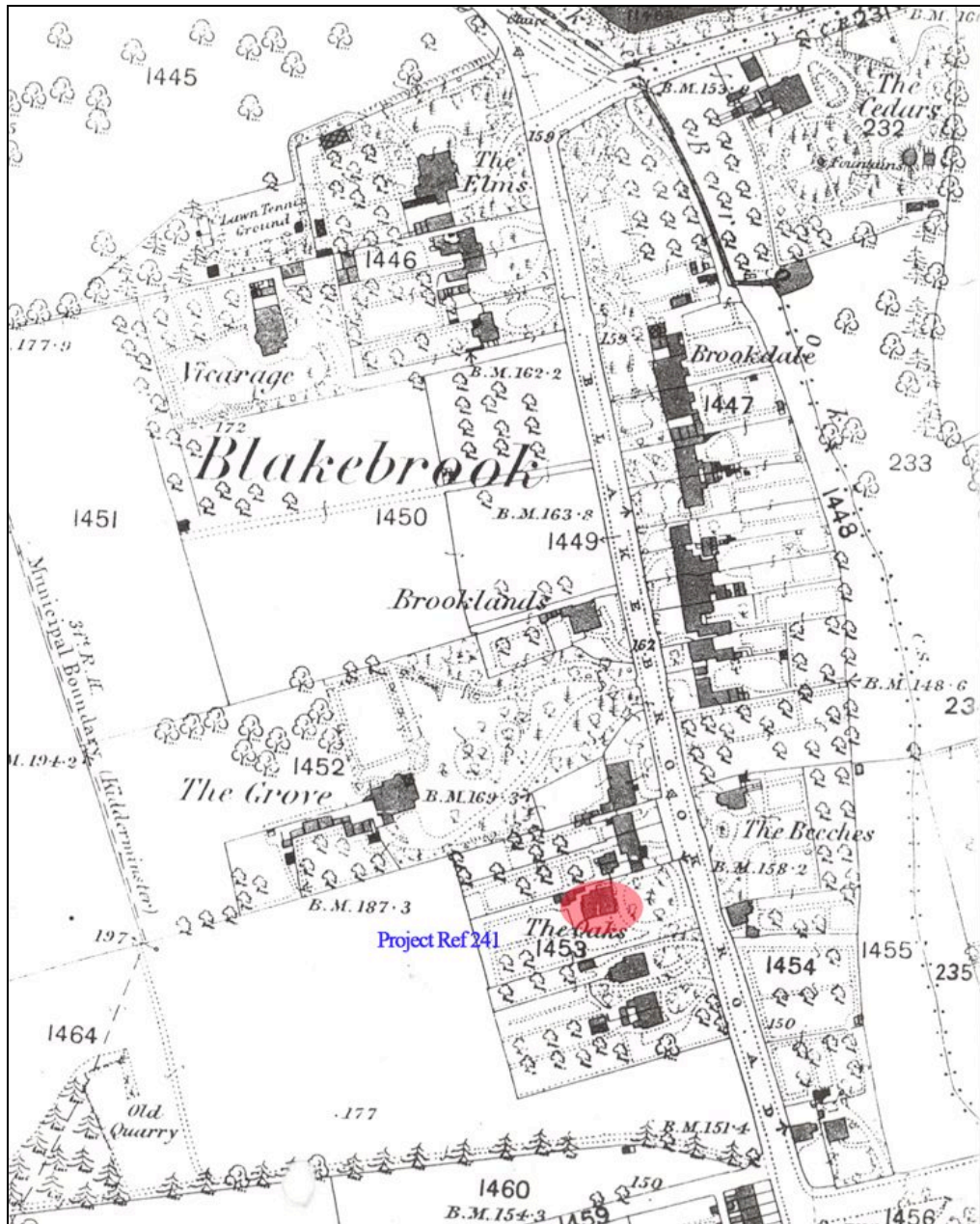
## Bibliography

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Len Smith, Carpet Weavers and Carpet Masters, 1986.

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

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The Oaks and Blakebrook 1885 - OS Ref 822756