

Building Record

The Grove, 9 Blakebrook, Kidderminster

Author: Nigel Gilbert

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Introduction

This report was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. This is a fine detached house in the most distinguished of Kidderminster's streets. It is set well back from the street, and pedestrians might easily miss it. One of the houses built in its grounds, which was originally called the Limes, has for some reason now taken 'The Grove' as its name. (See HKP Report 243) Many of the Blakebrook houses are listed, although surprisingly this is not one of them. Built c1826, it has been home to a number of the town's most prominent citizens, including Samuel Beddoes, James Humphries and James Harvey. Resources of both Kidderminster library and Worcester Record Office have been used. We have also been able to use deeds held by Wyre Forest District Council.

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 Grove

The poor rate list of November 1824 has the name of Samuel Beddoes pencilled in as an afterthought. He had evidently recently purchased the ground. Subsequent entries have him owning land valued at £2, and it was not until 1826 that the house is shown. It was unusual for Blakebrook in having extensive grounds and being set well back from the road. Today Jellyman Close has been built into these grounds, and The Grove is easily missed by anyone passing along Blakebrook.



The Grove pictured in 2009

The builder, Samuel Beddoes, was a baker, who continued in occupation until at least 1852. Little is known of Beddoes, even though he was High Bailiff of the town three times, in 1826-7, 1828-9 and 1833-4. (p101, Gilbert, 2004) He was born in Kidderminster c1783. He was clearly a wealthy man by the 1823, when he lent £350 by way of mortgage on a property in Broad Street. (Deeds held by Wyre Forest District Council, Ref. DP416) He was then described as a baker. In that year the poor rate list shows he was occupying premises in Coventry Street close to Swan Street. (WRO BA 10470/170) In 1833 the occupiers there were listed as Beddoes and Green. The list for 1845 shows that he owned a row of five properties next to what was to become the Clarence pub, which itself was next to the premises of Prichard and Harvey, wine merchants. (WRO BA10470/182) The list for September 1846 shows the first of these as house and bakehouse. (WRO BA 10470/183)

Eventually Beddoes decided to capitalise on the large amount of land attached to the Grove. The poor rate lists from April 1849 show two new houses owned by him and

built upon this land. These were The Limes (now no.8) and a smaller house (now no.10) built on either side of the carriage drive entrance to The Grove.

Beddoes died in 1852. In his will he left all his freehold property to his daughter, including the three Blakebrook houses. She was named as Elizabeth Beddoes Bore and we must presume she was Samuel's adopted daughter. At the 1851 census she was only 15. His housekeeper was Elizabeth Bore, for whom also provision was made in the will. She too was part of Beddoes' household in 1851, when she was 39 years old. In September 1856 Elizabeth, the daughter, married William Buckell Tomkinson, and his name appears thereafter as owner of the Grove and the other two houses in the poor rate list. Little is known of Tomkinson, except that by 1886 he was a gentleman of Caernarvon. (Deeds held by Wyre Forest Council for 3-7 Coventry Street)

For many years the Grove had noteworthy tenants from the important carpet manufacturing family of Humphries. Their company had been set up in Mill Street in the late 18th century by Benjamin Humphries. His son James (1797-1880) entered partnership with him in 1828. When James retired, his son John took over the business. The Humphries company was one of the first in Kidderminster to install steam power in the year 1852. (p93/4, Jacobs, 1968) This had undoubtedly been facilitated by John's marriage to the daughter of George Collier of Halifax, where the British rights to the steam power patent were held by Crossleys. It was John who first tenanted the Grove, and he is shown there on the poor rate lists from 1857. (WRO BA10470/205) He was still there in 1868. (Post Office Directory) By the 1871 census his father, James, had taken over the tenancy and he remained there until his death in 1886.

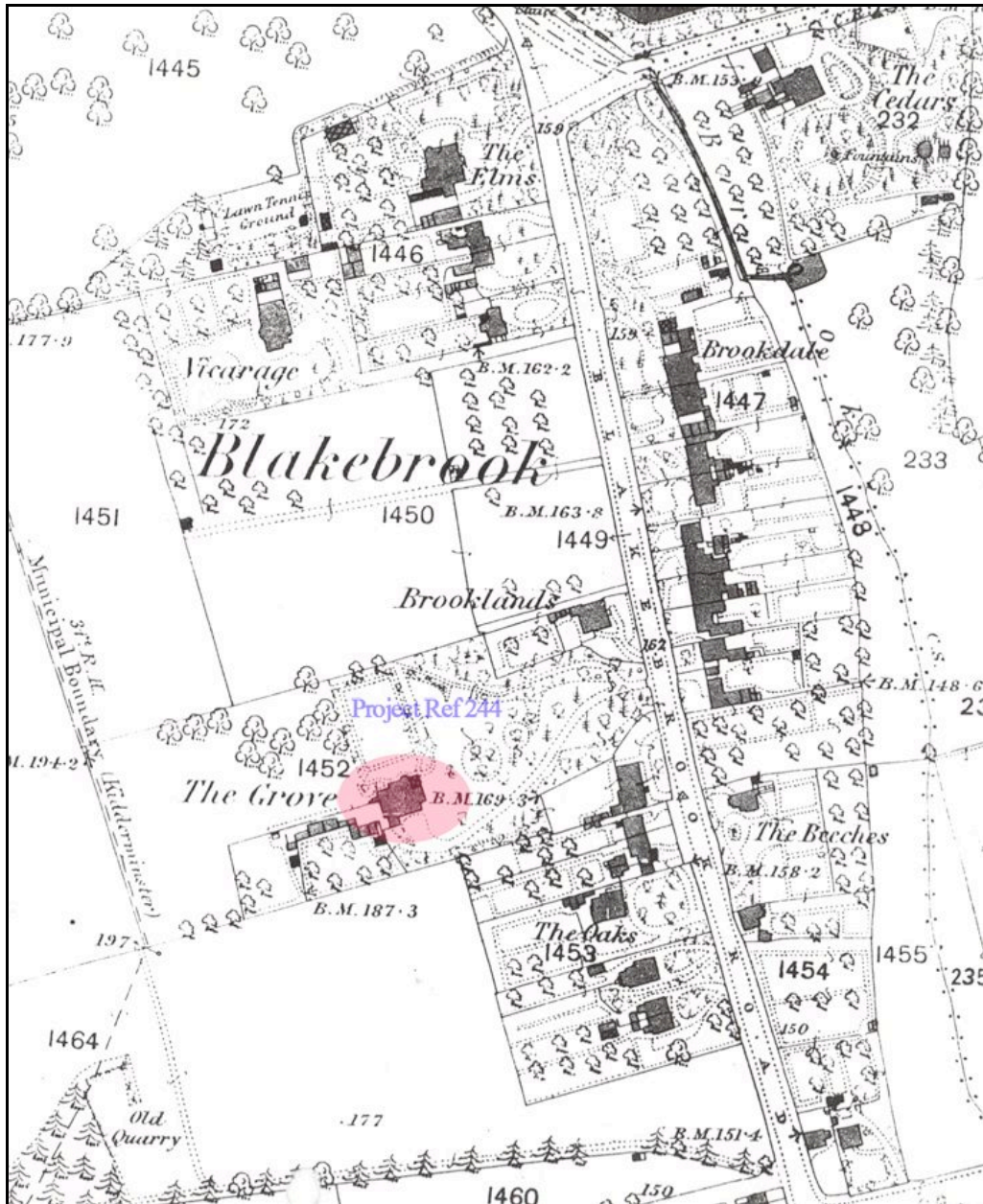
After James Humphries died, another important figure in Kidderminster's business community took the tenancy. This was James Joseph Harvey, the wine merchant. He appeared on the poor rate list for 1887. (WRO BA 10470/238) He had for some years been residing nearby at what is now number 14 Blakebrook. (See HKP Report 248) His father was the first John Harvey of the famous Bristol firm of wine merchants. James had come to Kidderminster in 1864 to help run the Kidderminster branch of the company. (KS 4.8.1900) He married the eldest daughter of his Blakebrook neighbour, Daniel Wagstaff Goodwin. (See HKP Report 249) James died at the Grove in 1900.

Bibliography

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

Don Gilbert, Town and Borough: A Civic History of Kidderminster, 2004.

Bertram Jacobs, The Story of British Carpets, 1968.



The Grove and Blakebrook 1885. The extensive grounds can be easily seen, even with the addition of two houses fronting the street. The Limes is the house in the south-east corner of the grounds. OS Ref: 820767