

Building Report

Sunnyside, Wolverley Road, Franche

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Introduction

This report was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. Resources at both Worcester Record Office and Kidderminster Library have been used. Sunnyside is a significant element in the 19th century growth of Franche. It was built by James Morgan, one member of a prolific market gardening family based in Franche, and later it was the home of the important carpet manufacturer, Michael Tomkinson. It was known at one time as Hencroft, but acquired its present name by 1885, probably from Tomkinson. The deeds held by the joint author of this report, who is the current owner of Sunnyside, John Combe, have provided essential material.



Sunnyside 1921

History

Sunnyside is a very large Victorian house, situated along the Wolverley Road about 200 yards from the road island by the Three Crowns and Sugar Loaf pub in Franche. The land was purchased by James Morgan in July 1844. He had already built the house adjoining the new plot on its west side, which was his home and was later to be known as Franche Villa. His new purchase contained a little over two acres, with a

frontage of 150 yards or so to the main road. St Barnabas church was later built on this plot. In November 1844 Morgan borrowed £500. This was a very large sum of money, and there can be little doubt that he used it to build Sunnyside. (WRO BA 4600/955)

The house was built by January 1847 when it first appeared on the poor rate list. Morgan had moved into it by April 1850, when the poor rate list shows him living in a house having just over two acres of land. Morgan had borrowed heavily to finance his building of the two houses on Wolverley Road. He repaid little if any of this mortgage debt, originally all owed to a William Jones. In 1863 the mortgage £680 was transferred to Joseph Chellingworth of Trimpley. It is not known whether Chellingworth called in the debt, but in 1867 the house was conveyed to him as purchaser. Morgan may well have been ready to move into something smaller, because by then he would have been about 72 years old. He and his wife seem to have moved into a small nursery house, now 4 Nursery Grove in Franche.

On 31st December 1868 Chellingworth leased Sunnyside to Michael Tomkinson for fifteen years at a rent of £50, with an agreement to sell it to him on 26th December 1883 for £1400. When Chellingworth died in 1874 the house was known as Hencroft. It was bequeathed to a solicitor Benjamin Gardner, who duly completed the promised sale to Tomkinson in 1884. Eight of Tomkinson's children were born at this house, named Sunnyside in the 1885 OS map. The last of these children was Geoffrey, who later lived at Whitville and was knighted in 1955. (p101, Tomkinson and Hall, 1975)



Rear of Sunnyside 2007

Michael Tomkinson, who was one of Kidderminster's leading carpet manufacturers, died in 1921. He had previously conveyed the house over to his son Captain Wilfred Tomkinson (Royal Navy) on the 5th January 1920, but it was included with the auction of Michael's property. On 6th January 1922 Wilfred completed the sale of Sunnyside to the Kidderminster Board of Guardians for £1,800. The Guardians had previously held the property on a lease at £115 per annum.

On 21st July 1923 Clement Dalley wrote to the *Shuttle* condemning the use of Sunnyside for disadvantaged children:

“When I read in your issue of June 30th that the Guardians have forty children herded together in the home at Franche, I could not help feeling sorry that they, the Guardians have strayed so far from the policy that was to be carried out when the Local Government Board insisted that all young children should be removed from the Union Workhouse and boarded out with respectable foster parents, and now after all these years they confess to having forty children in the home....Many eminent men have sprung from lowly homes, and children committed to worthy members of our working class community will learn more useful knowledge than they are ever likely to in the offshoot of a workhouse.”

The house continued to be owned by the Guardians until it was bought back by Geoffrey and Francis Tomkinson from Worcestershire County Council for £925 on 23.12.1930 making the Tomkinson family a profit of £875. On the 8.5.1955 the house was conveyed to Margaret Tomkinson by her brothers Geoffrey and Francis.. Margaret married on 4.9.1956 and became Mrs M. Freeman. Margaret Freeman sold 66sq. yards to St. Barnabas Church in September 1960 and in the same month Sunnyside was sold to Mrs. Combe for £5,050, the final end to many years of interest in the property by the Tomkinson family. The house had been divided into residential flats for a number of years and Mrs Combe carried on with this, selling off some of the land which included an overgrown kitchen garden and orchard on the eastern side of the house to Borrington Investments on 26.11.1960, who developed Sunnyside Gardens. On 11.5.1965 a parcel of land at the rear of St. Barnabas Church which included tennis courts and a dilapidated cottage to Diane Smith of Honeybrook Lodge. Mrs Combe kept the house as flats and since 1973 her son John Combe has lived in a flat there and hopes to keep the house as it is. Sunnyside has had the good fortune to survive the property development explosion of the 1960's and hopefully has a long future.

Description

There is no doubt Sunnyside has been enlarged considerably from the house first built. Plans of the house show a rectangular structure up to and including 1884. The OS map of 1885 appears to show the two bays added. The 1902 edition has the extension at the north west corner and the substantial extension stretching back from the east end of the house.

After the death of Michael Tomkinson of Franche Hall in 1921 his estate, including Sunnyside, was put up for sale. The sales particulars of November of that year gave a full description of the house.

