



The Balsall Heath Local History Society was founded in 1979 with the aim of promoting interest in our local history. We feel pride in our area and value its strengths – past and present. To meet our aims we work with local schools and community groups organising exhibitions and events. We have also produced several publications. We are a registered charity and rely on grants and donations to achieve our aims. For more information on our work, or to volunteer and help please contact us.

PEEL'S MISSING PLINTH!



The statue of **Sir Robert Peel (1788 - 1850)** has moved a lot for a piece of bronze! The site outside the Police Training Centre on Pershore Road (*lower right*) is his fourth home. He originally stood in Congreve Street before moving, in 1873, to the top of Victoria Square (then called Council House Square). In November 1926 he was hit by a gas lamp (which in turn had been hit by a lorry) and moved again, to Calthorpe Park, after being repaired.

Its current position, since 1963, is fitting for the founder of the Metropolitan Police. Sir Robert was also Conservative Prime Minister in 1834 and again from 1841-6. The statue was the work of **Peter Hollins**, a Birmingham man, and was cast at Elkington and Masons in Newhall Street. At least 15,000 people attended the unveiling on 27 August 1855.

Peel's move from Calthorpe Park saw the plinth left behind and him placed on a dreadful triangular slab. Quite why he was moved to Calthorpe Park in the first place is a mystery. The plinth has suffered over the years with graffiti and what looks like attempts to remove the bronze lettering. I wonder how many of today's park users know why this monolith is here at all?

Pause For Thought



Minnie Faulkner outside her home in Main Terrace, **Wenman Street** in June 1962.



The Bartley sisters in **Calthorpe Park** in 1951. Left to right: Lily, seated, Veronica, Joyce, May, Olive, Angela, and Rosaleen. They would have walked down to the park from their home in **Mary Street**. In the distance, centrally behind them, is Robert Peel! Thanks to Jim Fitzpatrick for the photograph.

CUTTING THE WATKINS ESTATE

In 1870 despite the Balsall Heath Local Board expressing their regrets on "the position of the street proposed to be made", plans for Henry Street (named after Henry Ludlow through whose estate it passed) were approved. The new street was rather short in length. Whilst other streets formed on a West-East axis effectively joined the Moseley Road to the Ladypool Road, Henry Street extended only part of the way from the latter, being stopped by The Watkins Estate. Ten years later this was to change when it was absorbed into the newly created Oldfield Road but it left a road with two distinctly different ends – the "new" Oldfield Road end benefitting from better building styles. The development of the Watkins Estate saw the final connections made across rural land between Moseley and Ladypool Road and practically completed the urbanisation of the area.

The first stage of development came on July 14th 1888 when landowner John Gregory Watkins borrowed £5,000 giving as mortgage his land lying to the West of the Ladypool Road, East of the railway and South of Highgate Road. His architect, Edward Holmes, submitted to The Balsall Heath Board plans for the making of new roads. As a result four new roads were formed: Ombersley and Woodfield (*see right panel*), Oldfield and Kingsley. It is known that there was a sports pitch on the site of Ombersley Road at the time of the cutting, and this is a good candidate to be the pitch used for one season by Small Heath Alliance before they moved back to Bordesley, and later fame as Birmingham City FC. A map from 1888 shows that the name originally planned for Ombersley was Station Street.

Building plots were sold during 1888 with plans for the first twenty five houses being passed on May, 1st 1889. The houses built along these roads were aimed at upper working class families rather than middle class ones. The improved transport links with Birmingham ensured there would be no shortage of purchasers.

House-building in Ombersley Road was dominated by one firm, Draysey Brothers, who built 139 houses and two shops in the road. The Drayseys made part of their fortune as bookies and this led to Ombersley being known for a time as "Mugs' Row" – the houses being built out the losses incurred by their clients! If you wanted you could even buy a house from them as William Edward Draysey promptly set up an Estate Agent's business at 14 Ombersley Road. The Draysey Brothers were also involved in building along Woodfield and Kingsley Roads, but not Oldfield/Henry Street.

"Tunnelbacks" were a prominent feature of Oldfield Road where houses "tunnelled back" from the road in avenues. Access was gained via an entry which could be narrow or wide, depending on the builder's whim. This style was also a feature in the development of Watkins' other land in the area which lay East of the Ladypool Road, South of Alfred Street and West of Stoney Lane. Following the death of Watkins this land was developed when his trustees plans for the cutting of three new roads, to be called Colville, Brunswick and Fulham (the latter soon changed to Leamington). As part of these plans the widening of Ladypool Road was made possible by utilising land from the estate.

The cutting of these roads saw an end to Stoney Lane Farm, its farmhouse having been situated at the Stoney Lane end of Brunswick Road. In July 1891 plans were approved for the forming of four more roads on the farmland: Chesterton, Clifton, Roshven and Taunton - named after J. R. G. Taunton, the last Chairman of The Board in Balsall Heath before its inclusion into Birmingham.

JOHN GREGORY WATKINS

He was born on 4th June 1803 at Woodfield Lodge, Ombersley, Worcestershire. His father was a landowner too and the estate, along with their other holdings passed down to John.

Woodfield itself was some 130 acres in size. Fortunately he was a keen farmer and a Member of the Royal Agricultural Society. He was also an important figure in Civic life being a JP and, in 1850, becoming High Sheriff of Worcestershire. He died at home in April 1890.

His home remained in the Watkins family until 1920. It still stands today in Ombersley and is a Grade II listed building.

Two of the Watkins Estate roads have connections to his life. **WOODFIELD ROAD** is named after his country home – Woodfield Lodge - and **OMBERSLEY ROAD** named after the Worcestershire village in which it is located.

Below: Woodfield Lodge today



Next Meeting:

Thursday 27th February 7:30

The Venture

(Malvern Street by the farm)

The origin of some Kings Heath street names

By Andy Bishop

A welcome return for Andy who is from the Kings Heath Local History Society. He runs a lovely informative community website called b14kingsheath.net which is well worth a look.