

Heslington House, 56 Richmond Road, Worthing

According to a tithe map a house called Fairfield House was situated at this plot, and so we assume that the owner had it knocked down and built Heslington House around the 1840's. It is a 2-storey regency style house, with an annexe on the side.

The house was built on an angle, with the front elevation on the side, and consisted of a huge hall, 5 reception rooms, 5 bedrooms upstairs with 2 bathrooms, and 2 garages. The annex, built for the servants had 2 beds, a sitting room, kitchen and toilet. The grounds were ½ acre and at some stage there was a pond and a small maze. There was a sweeping driveway around a life-sized copy of Peitre Juliens's Amalthea with her goat", the original made in 1786 for Marie Antoinette, and now in the Louvre.

The first owner was William Talbot Agar, as shown on the census of 1851, he was married to Leonora, and they had 5 children. He came from a rich family, his father was a Baronet, William Agar a Kings Counsel, who owned properties in Brighton and Hastings. William Talbot, the son, was educated at Harrow and Cambridge Trinity College. He was an English cricketer with amateur status, playing for Cambridge University and Marylebone Cricket Club. He was also a Kings Counsel and admitted to Lincoln's Inn in 1832. He was a Trustee and Director of The Queen's Hotel in Hastings. His wife Leonora died, and he re-married in 1852 Jessy Harriet. He had a long life, dying in 1906.

The second owner was Alfred Jee, born in Liverpool, and a civil engineer on the railways. He was chief engineer for Sheffield & Manchester line, and was actually building the railway system. He met a horrible death driving a train in Spain 1858, where he was living and working 1851-58. His brother was also on that train. An embankment collapsed while he was driving the train. Alfred had a London residence, which was in Oxford Square and Heslington House.

In 1851 the census records Alfred Jee as staying with his father-in-law, William Robinson at 77 Cable street, Liverpool, maybe on his way to Spain.

Also staying there was an Ann Satherthwaite (69) a visitor from Worthing. We haven't been able to find any more information about her.

His wife was Elizabeth Robinson 1819 – 1876. She lived at Heslington House until the end of her life. Her last son Alfred was born here.

In 1864 the eldest daughter Marion, married a grenadier guard Robert Paterson Fox at Broadwater, it was reported to be one of the grandest weddings of the neighbourhood. She had 8 bridesmaids, one of which was her sister Madeline, her uncle Captain George Robinson gave her away, and her 3 brothers attended, Edward, Herbert and Alfred. Marion and Robert then lived in Colchester.

In 1881 there was a daring robbery committed at Heslington House, the resident owner being Mr Alexander Ullathorne. Around 3.00 p.m the servants went upstairs to their bedroom and found their watches stolen and a purse emptied of a few shillings. It is supposed the thieves got into the house via the servants entrance and whilst the servants were having dinner from 1 – 2 o'clock. As the servants bedrooms are cut off from the main house, the thieves failed to gain access. Much to the dismay of the servants, but the owners must have been relieved !!

Alexander Ullathorne b 1837 (around 40 when moving to Heslington House) and lived in Kensington in 1871. He was a merchant who manufactured 'Flame' (when googling this it came up "A brief history of Flame – the story of the everyday lighter). This could possibly be the right goods.

He died in Brighton 1916, his spouse was Frances Landon and they had at least 4 children.

Whilst living at the property, Mr & Mrs Ullathorne, attended three society Worthing weddings. (details of which were recorded in detail in the papers).

One of the weddings they attended was a Miss Alice Coffen marrying Mr Robert Barber. She was the eldest daughter of Edmund Coffen, an old and respected inhabitant of the town. They were married at St Mary's of the Angels, the bride was tastefully attired in a travelling dress of electric blue with trimming to match

in velvet and a feather bonnet. She had one bridesmaid her sister, dressed in a terracotta dress with bonnet to match. Her bouquet was of white roses and maiden fern given to her by the bridegroom. She was given away by her brother as her father was too ill to attend.

They then go on to describe who attended and what the gift they bought for the bride. The bridegroom bought her a silver hair brush, and we wondered if this was a tradition at that time. Mr & Mrs Ullathorne gave a silver soup dish, and Miss Ullathorne, a tea cosy, probably one she made. Also attending was Mr & Mrs Harwood (they are to come) gave a black fan, and Mr & Simpson (also to come) gave apostle spoons. After the ceremony they went back to the family home for light refreshments before going off to their honeymoon. It seems quite a simple affair compared to today's weddings. The other ones were similarly recorded, Maud Wisden marrying Mr Lancelot Andrews, and Edith Henty marrying Cyril Dodd.

1892 – Henry Harwood died at Heslington House. We don't know if he owned the house or was just staying there, and the house at this point may have belonged to his son, also Henry and who was married to the Ullathorne's eldest daughter.

Mr & Mrs Harwood also attended the 3 society weddings along with the Ullathornes.

Mr Henry Harwood was a magistrate. There were several references to him as he took Petty Sessions at the Worthing Police Court, he also sat on several Committees that related to judicial matters. For example there was an annual bazaar, "Pride of Worthing" and members of the local council, bench and other gentlemen attended, which included Mr Harwood.

One of his cases was a young girl accused of murdering her baby. Another case states Ellen Mills, a tramp, charged with stealing a butchers knife, and was remanded in custody.

Mrs Harwood attended the usual flower shows, and fetes, one was opened by Lady Loder for the Palestine cause and showed various articles from the Holy Land.

Walter Edward Simpson 1866 -1915 he bought the house around 1897. He came to Worthing in 1879 and became a partner in a doctor's practice . He was Church Warden at St Andrews Church, and very probably buried there.

We found an excerpt in a book describing Dr Simpson as follows:

“Our doctor was Dr Simpson. He had attended all our arrivals into the world. I believe my grandmother was his first patient in Worthing. The Doctor made his rounds in a dogcart drawn by a smart high-stepping horse and a groom up behind in his top hat with a cockade at the side. A few times when his patients took him near our house, he would whip me up beside him and take me on the rest of his rounds. The groom would hold the horse’s head and I would wait grandly in the front to await the end of the visit.”

In 1915 on his death, according to the Worthing Gazette, gave him the most glowing obituary, he was Worthing’s most prominent resident. He was medical officer at the Post Office and in 1885 he was acting surgeon to the 2nd Sussex Rifles and transferred to combatant Lieutenant , resigning his commission in 1885.

He was a member of the Board of Health for 8 years. He was elected to the first school board. Also he was a staunch Conservative, official at the Worthing Cricket Club and president of the Rugby Club, the Rowing Club and the Town Regatta. He was also interested in amateur dramatics.

How did he have time to be a doctor?

Walter's son Tom Thor 2nd Battalion of Shropshire Light Infantry was killed in the Boer War. His name is on the memorial in Steine Gardens. This was a dreadful blow to Walter.

On his death, the house was left to his son Walter Herbert Simpson and his wife, Emma, remained there.

Walter Herbert was a nurseryman and a tomato grower. From the end of the Victorian to the end of WW2 Worthing was internationally famous for its tomatoes, growing in greenhouses throughout the town. Now these areas are housing estates and the tomato growing has declined. Worthing's rise owes much to its delicious tomatoes but the part they played has never been given

the prominence it deserved. In 1870 growing land was exchanged for barrels of brandy at a rate of five barrels for an acre. By 1900 it had shot up to £500 for an acre- an incredible inflation Transport was needed for the tomatoes and so West Worthing Station was built.

The luscious Worthing tomatoes were so popular that the Dutch began sending apprentices to Worthing to learn how to grow tomatoes. Less than a century later the Dutch would be beating the Worthing grower by using more innovative techniques and cutting the price of growing the tomatoes.

Thus the Worthing trade declined. After WW2 there was a growing demand for land for house building as Worthing was becoming a retirement town.

The tomato growers sold their land to developers for house building.

The climate in West Sussex is ideal for tomato growing. Apparently the Dutch growers are back today and own and run the vast greenhouses to the west of Worthing with hundreds of acres of greenhouses growing tomatoes.

The Worthing tomatoes were among the best in the world.

In 1918 there was an incident when Dessie Gamble, cook, stole 7 window curtains, china, 6 lbs of tomatoes and other property. She was remanded in custody.

There was an incident in 1929 when a certain William Searle knocked at the door and asked for the loan of half a crown to bury his father. He was brought before the Magistrates and charged with falsely demanding money.

In 1945 Walter Herbert died and left the house to his wife, Yvonne, but the will said "the house at which I am living at my death" and unfortunately they had let the house at the time and were not living there, so her bid in court was dismissed and it became part of the residuary estate.

Therefore the Simpsons no longer lived in Heslington House after 1945. Yvonne was living in Christchurch Road.

The next occupant was Mr Leslie G Godden. He was an international art dealer. His business Godden & Son was the biggest in the south England at the time. The business was started by his father Arthur in 1900 and he retired in 1926, Leslie taking over. By the 60's it was known as "Goddens of Worthing" and run by L.G and Geoffrey Godden (son).

1949 Leslie contributed to the furnishing of Beach House.

Whilst living in the property Mr & Mrs Godden were well-known citizens of Worthing, chairing several committees, they attended the mayor's re-opening of the pier at the pavilion tea dance.

In 1929 when King George V was convalescing in Bognor, Queen Mary came to visit the firm. We found a newspaper report dated 1953 outlining that Queen Mary visited the shop in a Daimler with a royal crest arrived outside the shop. Mrs Godden was in the shop and she didn't recognise it was the Queen until a child standing nearby said "it's the Queen". Geoffrey was a baby sleeping in the pram and the Queen asked to see him. She bought a few items such as a Sheriton card tray and a bow-fronted chest.

In 1959 a scale model ship was bought for £1,200 at Christies by Mr Leslie Godden, said to have secured it for the nation. It was a 17th century model of the 1st royal yacht belonging to Charles II called 'The Mary'. It is now kept at Greenwich.

In 1960 his son Geoffrey specialised in ceramics. He was well known on TV, appearing on the "Going for a Song" and "the Antiques Roadshow". He also wrote many books on the subject.

A younger son, John Godden did not wish to go into the family antique's business, John followed a more academic path, going to St Edmund's College, Oxford.

He worked as a librarian for the Central Office of Information, and combined his career with being an artist. Although largely self-taught, John also studied at Art School in London.

He lived in Tottenham for many years taking photographs of the area and then worked these into a painting. He was a prolific painter, mostly of buildings and views, unfortunately, nothing of

Worthing. He exhibited work at the Royal Academy. He retired early to Hereford and continued to paint.

Leslie and Molly Godden moved from Heslington House to Marine Gardens because of health issues. Leslie died in 1977.

In 1976 Hesling House was granted a Grade II listed building. Lloyds TSB Bank took over the building and used it as their offices.

In 2019 it is now derelict but planning consent given for alterations to convert into 8 flats. Valued at £1,047,000. There are workmen there right now, and it will now become luxury flats.

So we found a letter in the Worthing Journal from a Mr Jonathan Godden asking if anybody had any information about Heslington House, and Maureen wrote to him, and he has supplied us with details of his grandparents, their house, garden, and including the statue of Amalthea with her goat, which unfortunately is no longer there.