

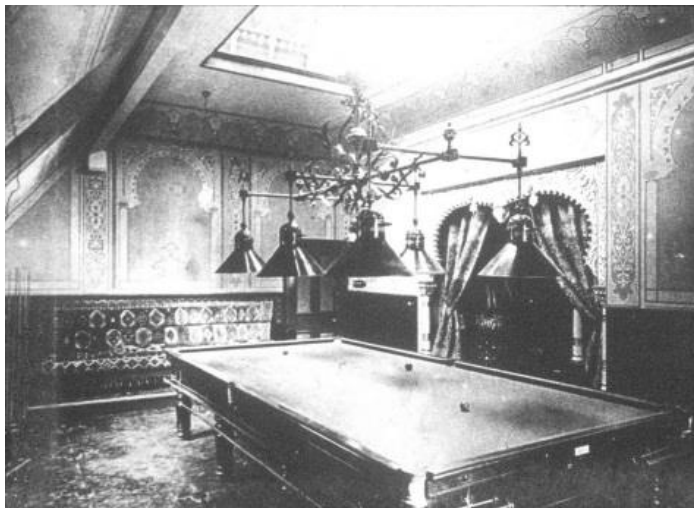
# The History of Sorrento

Sorrento began life as a large house on Wake Green Road. There is some debate as to who built the house; the most widely cited story is that it was William Adams, but Ann Griffiths has found evidence which may indicate that it was built by Thomas Ellis.

William Adams (1857-1911) was Midlands Director of the Refuge Assurance Company (founded by his father in Sheffield) and a renowned philanthropist.



Exterior of Sorrento. Made available by Roy Cockel



Interior of Sorrento as family home. Made available by Roy Cockel

He was a Primitive Methodist and endowed a number of chapels, was associated with the National Agricultural Labourer's Union and supported local sporting events including Cricket and Athletics. The story is that William Adams named the house after the Italian resort where he spent his honeymoon. Adams had 4 daughters and 11 grandchildren, who all grew up in Moseley.

After his death the family moved to Abingdon Lodge 62 Wake Green Road (Price 1994) and from 1911 Sorrento was used as an institution for the poor and needy.

Whilst doing family history research, Ann Griffiths uncovered some evidence to challenge this version of events. She noticed a memorial in St Mary's churchyard which bears the inscription 'Thomas Ellis of Sorrento Moseley' (Griffiths 2013; 7-8) and began to search for information about the connection. She found data which suggested that after his return from New Zealand in 1879, he was having a villa built on Wake Green Road designed by the architect William Doubleday of 23 Colmore Road (Griffiths 2013; 12).



Garden at Sorrento. Made available by Roy Cockel



Interior of Sorrento as family home.  
Made available by Roy Cockel

Ann came across a memorandum relating to this villa and plans for it in Birmingham Central Library Archive. She consulted the 1890 Ordinance Survey map for Moseley and found the Ellis estate on Wake Green Road along with the name Sorrento (Griffiths 2013; 13). Family memories tie in with this including the belief that great grandfather had been brought up in a house called Sorrento which later became a hospital (Griffiths 2013; 13). Thomas Ellis died in 1890 and in 1893 Hannah Daniels died at Sorrento, which Griffiths suggests means that 2 families lived at Sorrento before William Adams (2013; 113), who lived until there 1911. However it is unclear what position Hannah Daniels held, another possibility was that she was a servant in the Adams household.

After this period, the history of the house becomes more straightforward. Sorrento was sold to Neville Chamberlain in 1916 and used as a convalescence home during the Great War, for recovering soldiers, many of whom were paraplegics. In 1929 Birmingham City took over Sorrento and it became a maternity hospital for women on low incomes, later becoming a part of the NHS. In 1931 Sorrento had 20 beds, but this number eventually increased to 80, handling around 2,500 deliveries a year. The hospital expanded by extension into several Victorian houses in Anderton Park Road and Wake Green Road. The only purpose built buildings were the boiler house and the delivery and theatre suite. The hospital was sadly closed in 1993 and a retirement complex, Sorrento Court, has been built on the site of the house (Baker 2007).



Exterior of Sorrento 1985.  
With kind permission of Roy Cockel



Rear Exterior of Sorrento 1985.  
With kind permission of Roy Cockel.



Outpatients Department Sorrento 1985.  
With kind permission of Roy Cockel.

## Bibliography

**Baker, C.** 2007, 'Sorrento Maternity Hospital', *Birmingham History* [online], Available at [http://www.bhamb14.co.uk/index\\_files/SORRENTOMATERNITYHOSPITAL.htm](http://www.bhamb14.co.uk/index_files/SORRENTOMATERNITYHOSPITAL.htm), accessed on 13/01/2013

**Griffiths, A.** 2013, *The History of the Ellis Family: The Sorrento Connection*, History into Print, Studley)

**Price, F.** 1994, *Some Moseley Personalities Volume II*, Moseley Society Local History Group, Moseley.

Historic images provided by Roy Cockel.