

# People and Places around Moor Green, Moseley

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## 1. Introduction

The history of Moor Green Allotments can easily be traced back to the 1930s but the history of the area certainly goes back much further. To the uninitiated and those who are not local, Moor Green Allotments can be found down a narrow, gated, walkway off Russell Road and through the main gates off Holder's Lane.

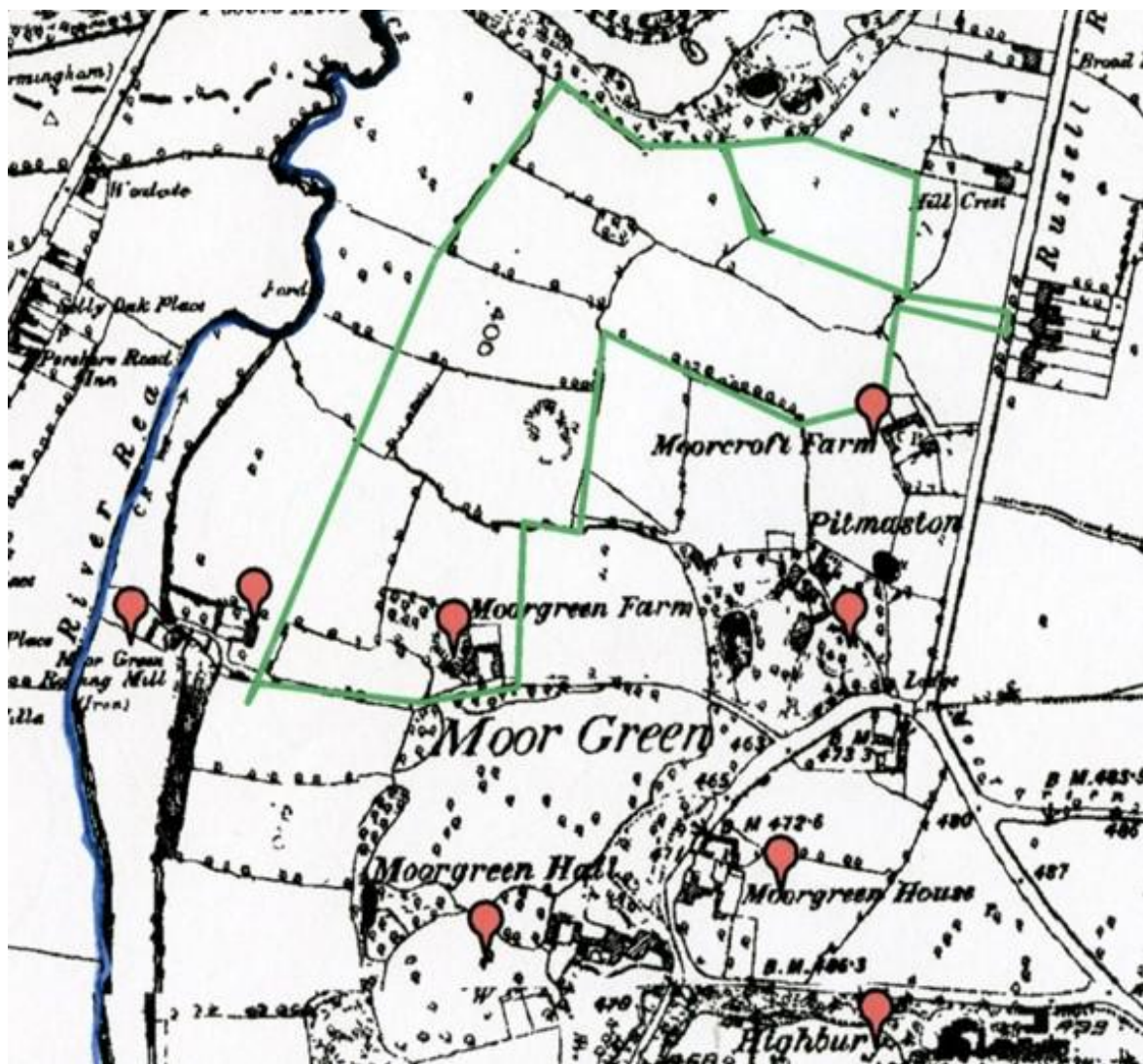


**Moor Green Lane Lower End 1934.<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Library of Birmingham (LB), MS 2724/2/B/5262.

The area contained quite a few houses with land that was owned by local businessmen and their families. Much of the land was originally agricultural and was farmed, that is until successful local businessmen started to buy up the land to develop into their estates. Moseley had excellent access to the centre of Birmingham and when the railway was built, excellent access to London and wider afield both from the early station, originally named 'Moseley Station' but later renamed 'Kings Heath Station,' and later when the new 'Moseley Station' was built behind St Mary's Church, Moseley. The following gives some idea about the local farms and estates and who lived in them.



Moor Green in the 1890s. (The future allotment site is outlined in green.)

## **2. Moor Green Farm**

This was an early working farm in 1871 although there are records of a Moor Green Farm that date back to 1743, including lands in Moseley and Kings Norton.<sup>2</sup> In 1871, James Lane, a forty four year old farm labourer lived here with his forty four year old wife and his nine year old niece, Mary A Moore. James Lane originally came from Herefordshire and in 1891 was a gardener living at 49 Ten Acres, Northfield.

Ten years later, the 1881 census shows John Hawkesworth, Bailiff, aged thirty four years lived there with his wife Charlotte (aged forty one years), three daughters, Harriett, Ada and Charlotte, aged between one and thirteen years, four sons, Charles, William, John and Isaac, aged between four months and ten years, two visitors and one servant. In 1871, he was an agricultural labourer at Swynnerton Staffordshire, married to Charlotte with Harriet, three years old, Ada, two years old and Charles, six months old. The Hawkesworth family do not appear to have stayed at Moor Green Farm for long as he was a farmer at 'Selly Farm,' Warwood lane, Northfield in 1891. Living with him there were his wife, Charlotte, and their children with the exception of Ada then twenty two years old. Their mother, Charlotte died in 1892 aged fifty two years, by which time she had been married for twenty six years.

David Davies lived in Moor Green Farm in 1891 and 1901. In the 1891 census his occupation was given as 'Farm Manager' and he was fifty one years old and his wife Frances forty four years. He had a son, John, aged twenty one years

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<sup>2</sup> LB, MS1098/2/1/21, Lease of Rt Rev Richard Smallbroke and Stepen Barrs of Moseley, Yeoman.

and four daughters, Frances, Alice, Emily and Sarah, aged between four and seventeen years. In the 1901 census he is the Farm bailiff and he had two daughters, Frances and Emily, aged nineteen and twenty seven years and a son, Samuel, twenty four years living with him and his wife Frances. Samuel was not listed in 1891. Aged fourteen years he may have been away at school. Alice and Sarah were not listed in 1901. Perhaps Alice, who would have been twenty six was either married or working away from home, but Sarah would have only been fourteen years old. There were two farm labourers living with them, two single males aged sixteen and twenty years.

### **3. Moorcroft Farm**

George and Alfred Preston are recorded as farming Moorcroft Farm from 1876 to 1879. In the 1871 census Alfred, aged 35 years is the household head and described as a farmer with 93 acres at Moorcroft Farm. Living with him were, his Uncle, George Preston, aged 62 years, described in the same way, Esther Price, married, aged 34 years and a visitor, a housekeeper, a domestic servant and three farm labourers. From 1880, only Alfred Preston was farming the land and there is no mention of George. In 1881, Alfred had 108 acres and employed five men. He was forty eight years old, married to Elizabeth, aged forty years, and had one daughter, Lizzie Mary, aged two years. Living with them were his sister-in-law, Esther Price (married), his niece Elizabeth Watson, aged eleven years, his nephew Samuel James Watson, aged seven years, a sixteen year old female servant and two farm labourers, sixteen and nineteen years old.

In 1883 there was a scandal. Walter J Harrison (b.1847), a merchant, and also brother-in-law to Alfred Preston, committed suicide by ingesting Prussic Acid in a field called 'Bromley' near Moseley.<sup>3</sup> John Arnold, a solicitor, of *Moseley Hill*, known to the deceased for twenty five years, had taken him to Cannon Hill in his 'phaeton' carriage and found him 'very excited'. Walter spoke of pecuniary difficulties saying, 'I am very hard pressed. They are all round me for money.' He had 3¼ d in his pocket.<sup>4</sup>

George Edward Collett took over Moorcroft Farm in 1890 and in the 1891 census was thirty six years old and married to Eliza aged thirty eight years. They had four daughters, Harriet, Eva, Una and Flora, aged between eleven months and eleven years and one son, Jesse, aged five years. The family had a visitor, a school mistress, aged twenty three years, staying and one male servant, an eighteen year old farm labourer. In 1881 George was a general labourer, aged twenty six, living at home with his parents in Barton St Mary, Gloucestershire. In 1901 he and his wife, now aged 46 and 49 years, were at Park House Lane, Coughton, Sambourne, Warwickshire, with five daughters. Their daughter, Flora, now 7 years old, had been born as well as another son, Otto, aged 6 years, but Jesse, who would by now have been 15 years old, is not listed. He was listed as a farmer and employer and living with him was an

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<sup>3</sup>*The Birmingham Daily Post*, Friday 27 April, 1883, [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) The inquest was held at the *Trafalgar Hotel*, Woodbridge Road, Moseley before Mr Ralph Docker, a local man. Walter J Harrison in 1881 was 34 years old (b. c.1847 in Birmingham), a wine merchant, and his wife Clara aged 23 years and 1 servant, aged 20. John Arnold was 62 years old in 1881, a solicitor living in Moor Green Lane with his wife, Elizabeth aged 65 years, his daughter, Lizzie aged 36 years, his son H E Arnold, aged 29 years and 4 servants, 3 females aged 20, 24 and 33 years and one male aged 18 years. Alfred Preston was a farmer with 108 acres employing 5 men living at *Moorcroft Farm*, Russell Road, Moseley, aged 48 years in 1881, married to Elizabeth aged 40 years with a daughter, Lizzie Mary, aged 2 years and living with them were his sister-in-law, Esther Price (married), his niece Elizabeth Watson 11 years, his nephew Samuel James Watson, 7 years and a 16 year old female servant and 2 farm labourers, 16 and 19 years.

<sup>4</sup>*The Birmingham Daily Post*, Friday 27 April, 1883, [www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk). The deceased's brother was Alfred Preston of *Moorcroft Farm* and business letters and boxes were located at the *Stork Hotel*. The *Stork Hotel* was a large hotel built in 1882 in Corporation Street, designed by architect W H Watson in the French Renaissance style and demolished in the 1960s.

eighteen year old youth, a groom and horse servant. In 1911, he is still a farmer at Sambourne at *Parkfield House*. He was fifty six years old and his wife, Eliza, was fifty nine years. Still living at home were their daughters Flora and Winifred, aged twenty and seventeen years and his son, Otto, aged sixteen years, described as a farmyard assistant and a general male servant aged sixteen years. At this point, ten children had been born alive, seven were still living and three had died.



**Moorcroft Farm.<sup>5</sup>**

In 1894, Joseph Arnott, a farmer, took Moorcroft Farm and in the 1901 census was fifty three years old, married to Mary aged forty eight years and had two sons, Joseph and John, twenty four and twenty two years old and eight daughters, Ellen, Dora, Mary, Maggie, Fanny, Clara, Edith and Gertrude between six and twenty three years of age, but no servants.

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<sup>5</sup>Photograph of an oil painting courtesy of Geoffrey Collett, a descendent of George Edward Collett.



#### 4. Cottage Farm

Cottage Farm was near to the Moor Green Rolling Mill on the River Rea. William Reynolds had this farm from around 1876 and was succeeded by his wife, daughter and son until around 1895. A William Reynolds, farmer, aged forty and married to Elizabeth, aged forty three, was living there in the 1901 census with six sons, William, Leonard, Ernest, Walter, Thomas and Bertie, aged from five to twenty three years and two daughters, Hannah and Ada, aged seventeen and fifteen years. There were no servants.



**Cottage near the site of the old mill Moor Green 1933.<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>6</sup> LB, MS 2724/2/B/5262.

## 5. Moor Green Hall

Moor Green Hall stood on Moor Green Lane opposite Yew Tree Road and was described as a 'Gothick, crenellated' building. The north end of Elizabeth Road now runs on the old site of the Hall, having now been demolished for almost one hundred years.



Ex Libris book plate belonging to Charlotte Chamberlain (daughter of Arthur).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Oldbirminghampictures.lefora.com Accessed 22 July 2016



It has a colourful history, being the home of Arthur Chamberlain (1842-1913), brother of Joseph Chamberlain, a well-known and well-loved politician who lived nearby at Highbury. Arthur was an industrialist and long term chairman of Kynoch Ltd, a chemical company but also a major Birmingham firm involved in a wide range of manufacturing, from explosives to bicycles. This firm would become a constituent part of Nobel Industries and later ICI. In the 1881 Census, Arthur was noted as employing 110 Men, thirty eight Women, and five Girls and six Boys aged below sixteen years of age. At this time he was living at Moor Green Hall with his wife, seven daughters and one son, a private Governess, and four household servants.

In 1914 Joseph Chamberlain had been long out of politics through ill health, while Arthur was chairman of Kynoch's making weapons. The New York Times reported an incident at the hall of the previous day in its edition of 13 February 1914:

*Birmingham, 12th. A tube charged with high explosives was found to-day on a window sill of Moor Green Hall, Highbury, near here, the residence of Arthur Chamberlain, brother of the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain.*

*A fuse attached to the bomb was connected with a photographer's lamp in which a candle had been burning. The flame, however, was extinguished before it reached the fuse. A postcard addressed to Reginald McKenna, the Home secretary, was found nearby. It bore the words, "Militancy is not dead, but if you are not already you soon will be." A quantity of suffrage literature was left nearby.*

The house was used by the Red Cross during the First World War as a military hospital, established in November 1914, with sixty three beds. It treated 1500 casualties during the war. Arthur's second son, John was awarded the Military Cross in WW1. Capt. John Chamberlain (b.22.12.1881) had been injured in the stomach, had recovered and was then killed by a stray shell at Boesinghe at Second Ypres, on the 14 May 1917.



**The last Red Cross Social at Moor Green Hall 1918.<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>8</sup>LB.,MS 2724/2/B/3489, MS2046, Box 3.

## 6. Moor Green House

Moor Green House stood on the east side of Moor Green Lane just before its junction with Yew Tree Road. Boundary Drive stands roughly on the site of the original house.



**Moor Green House.<sup>9</sup>**

In 1868 Moor Green House was occupied by Mr Thomas Clemont Sneyd Kynnersley (b. 1803) who had been appointed as Stipendiary Magistrate in Birmingham. He came from an old Staffordshire banking family and had worked the Oxford Circuit in 1832-55. The 1871 census shows he was a widower aged sixty seven years with three sons aged between sixteen and

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<sup>9</sup> LB., MS 3375/1/1/628, Sale of Moor Green House Estate.

twenty nine years and two daughters thirteen and twenty seven years old. He had four servants.

Kynnersley was interested in Reformatories, Industrial Schools and Prisoners' Aid Societies. He was JP for Warwickshire, Deputy Lieutenant for Warwickshire, JP for Worcestershire and Staffordshire, Deputy Chairman of Warwickshire Quarter Sessions, Recorder of Newcastle-under-Lyme.

The death of T. C. S. Kynnersley, aged eighty eight years, was listed in the *Moseley and Kings Heath Journal* in 1892.<sup>10</sup> His obituary named his home, Moor Green House, gave the reason for his death (following an operation for strangulated hernia) and detailed his family, education, achievements, titles and interests.<sup>11</sup> The report listed all the important mourners, including his servants.<sup>12</sup> When he died, according to the London Probate, he left the grand sum of £11,295 4s 10d.

The 1881 census shows only the two daughters, Anna and Harriett, still at Moor Green House. The daughters were still at home in the 1891 census, now aged thirty three and forty seven years old, along with a grandson aged four years.

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<sup>10</sup> *Moseley and Kings Heath Journal* No.1, June 1892, Price 4d, Circulating South Birmingham and Warwickshire, JC6/7/1-173, BCLA.

<sup>11</sup> T.C. Kynnersley lived at *Moor Green House*. He died following an operation for strangulated hernia. He was born in 1803, a member of an old Staffordshire family, Sneyd. He went to Rugby and Cambridge/ and did Law being called to the bar at Middle Temple in June 1828. He worked the Oxford Circuit 1832-55 and was appointed Stipendiary Magistrate Birmingham in 1856. A 'beau-ideal' English country gentleman. He was buried in Moseley churchyard, *Moseley and Kings Heath Journal* No.1, June 1892, Price 4d, Circulating South Birmingham and Warwickshire, JC6/7/1-173, BCLA.

<sup>12</sup> *Moseley and Kings Heath Journal*, No.1, June 1892, JC6/7/1-173, BCLA.



Moor Green House was later the home of Sir John Holder's son, Henry, his wife Evelyne and their three daughters and one son. There were however eight staff, including a cook, four maids, a nurse and governess.<sup>13</sup> During the First World War the house was used as a hostel for Belgian refugees and then as a military hospital, as an annexe to Highbury, and became designated the 4th Auxiliary Hospital, Moseley.



**Moor Green House and Belgian Refugees.<sup>14</sup>**

It is not clear when this house was first built. It was sizeable as it had twenty-one rooms and we know it was demolished in 1920 as the Britannic Assurance office block was built in the grounds. This has recently been converted into luxury private flats.

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<sup>13</sup> Ancestry.co.uk/ Accessed 26 July 2016, the Holder family. 1911 Census.

<sup>14</sup> LB, MS, 2724/2/B/3489, WK/M6/82.

## 7. Pitmaston

In the late nineteenth century the Moor Green Estate was owned by John Charles Holder (1838-1923) who was a wealthy maltster and brewer and owned The Midland Brewery in Nova Scotia Street, close to Curzon Street station in Birmingham. The firm was taken over by Mitchell & Butler's in 1919 and the brewery closed soon afterwards.

Originally the Holder land was owned by the Weaman family who had been Ironmasters. In 1750, they sold their Birmingham land, which passed through several hands before it was eventually sold to John Charles Holder in 1898, the same year he became a baronet.<sup>15</sup> Holder then passed this land, together with some other land he acquired in 1899, mainly almshouses that were being cleared by The New Birmingham Improvement Scheme, for the site of The General Hospital in Birmingham Improvement.<sup>16</sup> Sir John Holder was a significant benefactor of the General Hospital. Indeed, the Holders made several generous donations to the city, including the stained glass window in The Great Hall at Birmingham University and several pieces of art to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.<sup>17</sup> The art included:

*Dominicans in Feathers* by H Stacey Marks

*Melody* by Kate Bunce

*The Piazza of St Marks, Venice* by Logsdail

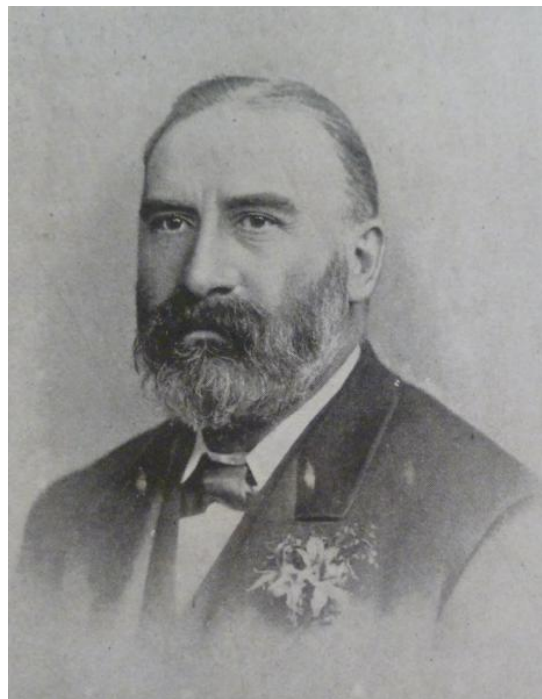
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<sup>15</sup> Library of Birmingham (LB), HC GH/3/1/1

<sup>16</sup> LB., Glovers Charity, MS2998

<sup>17</sup> Connectinghistories.org.uk Accessed 10 July 2016

There is no obvious connection to the Moor Green Allotments other than other land belonging to the Holders being sold at the same time that The Ideal Benefit Society acquired the majority of the Moor Green estate. Around this time Louisa Anne Ryland, another great Birmingham benefactor, inherited great wealth and land on the death of her father in 1843, following which Louisa donated many things to Birmingham, culminating in 66 acres of meadow land and six pieces of land that was formerly Moor Green Farm, this land being developed into Cannon Hill Park.<sup>18</sup> The Holders also donated land to the Cannon Hill Park project.<sup>19</sup> Holder's Gardens and Holder's Lane, where the main gate to Moor Green Allotments is located were named after Sir John Holder.



**Sir John Charles Holder (c1838-26.4.1923).<sup>20</sup>**

Sir John Charles Holder was the only son of an Innkeeper, Henry Holder, and was born in Birmingham in 1838. He was educated at Camp Hill and became

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<sup>18</sup> LB., MS39/1/2/3.

<sup>19</sup> Alangodfrey maps.co.uk, Accessed 26 June 2016, also on bgfl.org

<sup>20</sup> LB., MS39/1/2/3.

Justice of the Peace in both Worcester and Birmingham as well as Deputy Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff of Worcestershire.

In 1872, John Charles Holder married Geraldine Augusta Baynton Knipe, a descendant of John Williams, a famous horticulturist who had grown the Pitmaston Duchess Pear.<sup>21</sup> Pitmaston was the name of Geraldine's home in Worcester and this name was to be used later in the 1870s when the Moor Green estate was developed in Birmingham. Pitmaston House was built as the new home of the Holders and boasted a lake and a cascading stream. Most of the landscaping around the house dates from 1870 when the original Pitmaston House was built to replace Moor Green Cottage.

The Holders had ten children, six girls, Kathleen, Geraldine, Flora, Edith, Isabella and Gladys and four boys, Alfred, Henry, Norman and John.<sup>22</sup> They were also miniature railway enthusiasts fascinated with technology. They built a 10¼ inch gauge railway track around the grounds of the house in 1898 and the Holders recall 'with admiration', but discreetly don't repeat, the words that the then Prince of Wales (Edward VII) used when he rode on the train and burnt his hand by touching the rails. The railway appeared in an article in *The Model Engineer and Amateur Electrician* magazine in 1902 which also ran a picture of some fifteen people sitting on the train with their tennis racquets on

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<sup>21</sup> Ancestry.com, Accessed 25 June 2016, Holder Family; *Worcester News*, 3 July 2013, Re: Placement of Blue Plaque, also available on [worcesternews.co.uk](http://worcesternews.co.uk); *Birmingham Post*, 2 June 2003, Letter from R. Farrinton, CEO, Ideal Benefit Society.

<sup>22</sup> Ancestry.com., Accessed 25 June 2016, Holder Family



the way to the Pitmaston tennis courts. Holder is also quoted in '*The Car*' magazine of 1902.<sup>23</sup> He stated:

'It is hard to believe that this quiet and delightful retreat is so close to the suburbs of a large manufacturing city like Birmingham.....'Pitmaston' is one of those large estates which have preserved to Moor Green its picturesque aspect... saving them from being devoured by the onward march of the growing city, and its ubiquitous minions of the builder, who swallows up land in the near suburbs by the acre.'

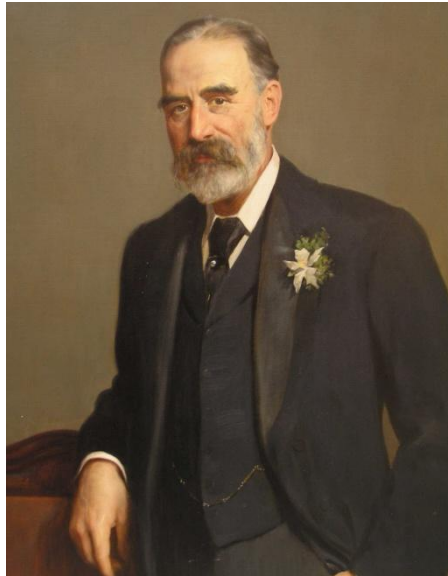
Ironically approximately ten years after his death this was the case with the development of his lands into housing.



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<sup>23</sup>*The Car magazine*, July 1902, p341





**Sir John Charles Holder (1838-1923)**

On his death in 1923, Holder's estate was valued at £597,278 16s 5d and this was left to his wife and four sons who survived him.<sup>24</sup> In November 1927 Holder's valuable oil paintings, watercolours and household furniture all went to auction with auctioneers Stone, Hooper and Pickard.<sup>25</sup> It is not clear why the auction was necessary as money was not short, but Sir John's widow went to live near Newbury in Berkshire and may have simply cleared the house.

In the 1920s and 1930s allotments became popular and developed in response to high food costs, unemployment and poverty following World War One.<sup>26</sup> In 1940 the 'Dig for Victory' government campaign further supported the development of allotments. Allotments were created on the Pitmaston estate within the following four streets: Russell Road, Goodby Road, Holders Lane and Moor Green Lane.

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<sup>24</sup> Birmingham Probate, 25 July 1923.

<sup>25</sup> Richardmanuscripts.co.uk/collection of 13 Sale Catalogues of Birmingham Auctioneers, Accessed 10 July 2016.

<sup>26</sup> LB., theironroom.wordpress.com, Allotments for the Unemployed, Posted 11 April 2016.



**Unemployed Men Digging an Allotment, 1930s.<sup>27</sup>**

In 1931 the Holder estate was acquired by The Ideal Benefit Society, a mutual, not-for-profit self-help organisation. They redeveloped the site and the Holder home, Pitmaston House, was demolished and rebuilt in a neo-Classical style by the architect Holland W Hobbis.

Lady Geraldine Holder died on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 1943, aged 98 years, at Bladon House, Newbury, Berkshire. She left £81,302 4s 4d to her son and two daughters and one grand-daughter.<sup>28</sup> Lady Geraldine's son, Sir Henry Holder, died on the 3 August 1945. According to Probate he left £55,163 14s 5d to his wife and two children and his solicitor. A further grant was issued on 22 November 1947 to his two brothers, John and Alfred, in the sum of £39,188.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.theironroom.wordpress.com>

<sup>28</sup> Ancestry.com/ Probate Records/ Holder Family.



The house was Grade II listed in 2003 and included in the Moseley Conservation Area the following year. After a few years lying empty, the sale of the building and grounds in September 2007, following the acquisition of The Ideal Benefit Society by The Oddfellows Friendly Society in the same year, caused some controversy as the estate was split into several lots.<sup>29</sup> One lot was acquired by The Church of Scientology as their regional base and training centre. In November 2012 the header of the *Birmingham Mail* ran 'Scientists reveal a £6 million plan to restore Moseley Mansion.'<sup>30</sup> This article also revealed they had purchased Pitmaston House for £4.2 million in 2007.<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately the Scientists have yet to raise funds to renovate the building and at present little work has been completed.

In 2007 other lots were acquired by T H Kingelee and Sons, who describe themselves as a 'development business' based in Oxfordshire.<sup>32</sup> They proposed a development of four houses and twenty-two apartments 'in the grounds of a listed building' which they have completed. As at June 2016, there are 'rumours' that Kingelee may be interested in purchasing Pitmaston House but as yet they are unwilling to make any comment to either confirm or deny this.

## **8. Highbury**

Joseph Chamberlain (1836-1914) came to Birmingham in 1854 to work in the successful family business of his uncle, in the Nettlefold screwmaking business. Nettlefold and Chamberlain was a great commercial success (now part of the firm GKN aka Guest, Keen and Nettlefold).

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<sup>29</sup> Martinmullaney.blogspot.co.uk, Accessed 25 June 2016.

<sup>30</sup> *Birmingham Mail*, 9 November 2012.

<sup>31</sup> BBC News, 16 May 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Kingerleehomes.co.uk, Accessed 26 June 2016, Sales Brochure.



Chamberlain was a successful businessman and held many civic positions in Birmingham including Mayor (1873-76) and Town Councillor (1868). He was on the School Board (1870), Chairman of the School Board (1873), a failed Parliamentary candidate in 1874, but returned in 1876, President of the Board of Trade and Colonial Secretary amongst other positions. He involved himself in such issues as the 1866 Birmingham March for Reform and the 1867 Birmingham Education League. Chamberlain changed the face of Birmingham. In just three short years as mayor. He transformed the city from an oversized slum to one of the most advanced cities in the world. He took the gas and water supplies into city ownership and provided its residents with the cleanest and most effective water and power supplies anywhere in the country.<sup>33</sup> He ploughed the proceeds into new housing, sewers and civic buildings, a new

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<sup>33</sup> [www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics](http://www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics), Lewis Goodall, BBC Newsnight, 15 August, 2016, from the section UK Politics.

museum and art gallery, a grand boulevard and a university.<sup>34</sup> He was the man who built Birmingham.<sup>35</sup> Much more information is available on the impact of the Chamberlain family on Birmingham and beyond.



**Celebrating Joseph Chamberlain's 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday, 1906.<sup>36</sup>**

After buying a large piece of agricultural land comprising 25 acres, Chamberlain started to build Highbury in 1878. No expense was to be spared and this was just at the start of his political career. Highbury was named after his childhood home in Islington, London, where he had many happy memories.

<sup>34</sup> [www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics](http://www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics), Lewis Goodall, BBC Newsnight, 15 August, 2016, from the section UK Politics.

<sup>35</sup> [www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics](http://www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics), Lewis Goodall, BBC Newsnight, 15 August, 2016, from the section UK Politics.

<sup>36</sup> Getty Images, [www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics](http://www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics), Lewis Goodall, BBC Newsnight, 15 August, 2016, from the section UK Politics.

His new home was designed by a respected architect with the same surname although he was not a relation. John Henry Chamberlain designed the house in a modern, Venetian, Gothic style and it became noted for its electric lighting, conservatories and orchid house. After acquiring more land in 1894, the estate covered 70 acres. By 1903 there were 25 greenhouses housing orchids and exotic plants. Chamberlain had a magnificent orchid collection that was housed in thirteen glasshouses and he would often be seen with an orchid in his lapel.



**Joseph Chamberlain<sup>37</sup>**

Once occupied the house became a family home for Joseph Chamberlain, his second wife Florence, his children Beatrice (b. 1862) and Austen (b. 1863), by his first wife Harriett, Neville (b.1869 – the future Prime Minister), Ida (b.1870),

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<sup>37</sup> Getty Images, [www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics](http://www.bbc.uk/news/politics-politics), Lewis Goodall, BBC Newsnight, 15 August, 2016, from the section UK Politics.



Hilda (b.1871) and Ethel (b.1873) by his second wife. Ethel wrote to Neville Chamberlain from *Highbury*, Moor Green in January 1897:

‘My dearest Neville.....

On Saturday evening the Moseley bell-ringers appeared and we all went into the hall to hear them as they were a great success. There were five of them this time – one of them being new one –he was continually being pushed and pushed in front by all of them but he had rather a bad time of it.’<sup>38</sup>

Unfortunately Florence died in 1875. In 1887, Joseph married American Mary Endicott, from a prominent New England family. Austen became MP in 1892 for East Worcestershire (in which Moseley lay) and rose to Chancellor and Foreign Secretary.

The family often entertained at Highbury, with grand occasions attended by people such as Winston Churchill and Beatrice Webb (nee Potter).<sup>39</sup> The gardens were maintained by eighteen gardeners<sup>40</sup> and were used for the Moseley Flower Show and Kings Heath Horse Show.<sup>41</sup> In 1914 there were over 4,000 guests being entertained in the garden.

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<sup>38</sup> NC1/14/27-154, Letter 152 and Photo.

<sup>39</sup> *West Midlands History*, Vol 2, Issue 2, Summer 2014, p26-27.

<sup>40</sup> *Highbury: The Home of Joseph Chamberlain*, brochure published by Birmingham City Council, undated.

<sup>41</sup> *Highbury: The Home of Joseph Chamberlain*, brochure published by Birmingham City Council, undated.

Highbury was used during the First World War as an Auxiliary Hospital by the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) and then as a home for disabled ex-servicemen specialising in neurological conditions. Initially a lot of the equipment was donated by Kynoch's, a chemical company based in Witton, Birmingham, where Arthur Chamberlain was CEO. The medical staff at Highbury consisted of a Commandant, Matron and eight sisters plus volunteers. It had 274 beds and an open-air ward, whilst the conservatories and greenhouses were used in emergencies.<sup>42</sup>

Joseph and his family lived at Highbury until his death in 1914. He is buried at Key Hill cemetery, Birmingham.

Neville tried to donate the house, on his father's death, to the nation as it was expensive to run but it was rejected. In 1919 Sir Austen Chamberlain gave Highbury to the Highbury Trustees and in 1921 Highbury Park was opened to the public. Further land was added in 1923 and 1924 which was donated by The Birmingham Civic Society. The Highbury Trustees presented Highbury to the Birmingham Corporation in 1932, where it has remained. In 1986 English Heritage added Highbury Park to the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.<sup>43</sup> Currently there is a new Trust running the historic Chamberlain home.

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<sup>42</sup> [www.beyondthetrenches.co.uk](http://www.beyondthetrenches.co.uk) Accessed 22 July 2016.

<sup>43</sup> [www.highburyparkfriends.org.uk](http://www.highburyparkfriends.org.uk) Accessed 22 July 2016.

### ***Highbury in Summary:***

Architect – Joseph Henry Chamberlain

Builders – John Barnsley and Sons

Gardens - Designed by Edward Milner

Glasshouses – Designed and Erected by Clark and Hope<sup>44</sup>

## **Janet Berry and Nina Caddick**

**2016**

*Information from [www.ancestry.co.uk](http://www.ancestry.co.uk) with supporting or additional information from other sources footnoted.*

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<sup>44</sup>West Midlands History, Vol 2, Issue 2, Summer 2014, p39.