

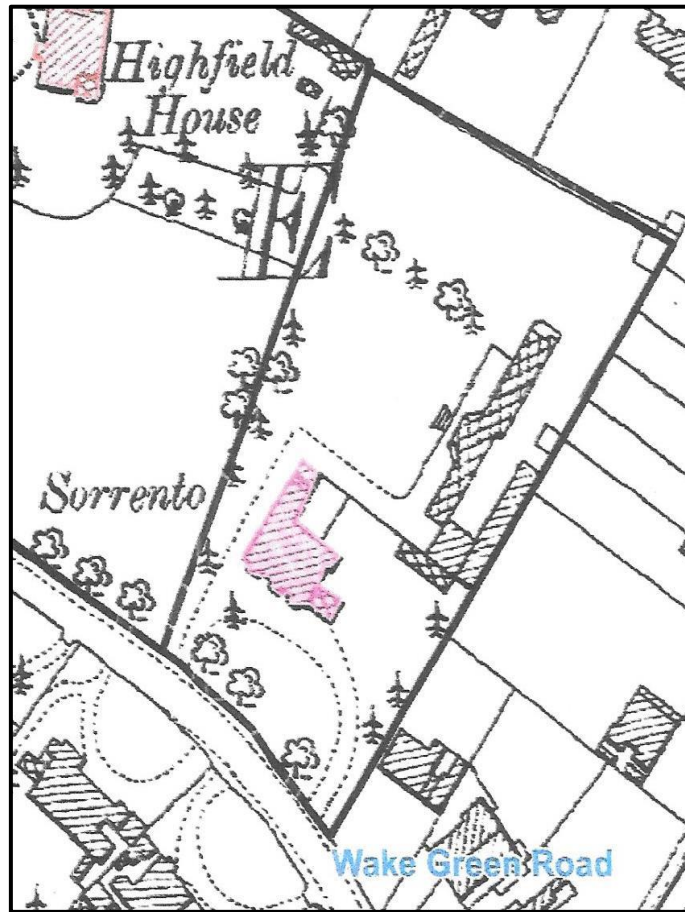
## **Sorrento: House and Garden, Wake Green Road, Moseley**

Sorrento, a large double-fronted three-storey detached house set in large grounds, was built in the second half of the nineteenth century on Wake Green Road. Moseley was quite built up by this time, and there were numerous houses backing onto the house and garden, but mature trees and shrubs ensured privacy. The photographs were taken in 1899 when the occupants were William Adams, the household head and the retired director of the Refuge Assurance Company, aged forty-one years, his wife, Martha, forty-two years old and their children, Mabel, aged eighteen, Gerline sixteen, Esther fourteen and Hilda nine. In the 1901 census the family had three servants, Mary Yates, aged twenty-two years, a housemaid, Frances Holland, aged thirty-two years, a cook, and Adela Price, aged thirty-nine years, a housekeeper.

**Sorrento, Wake Green Road, Moseley, 1899.**



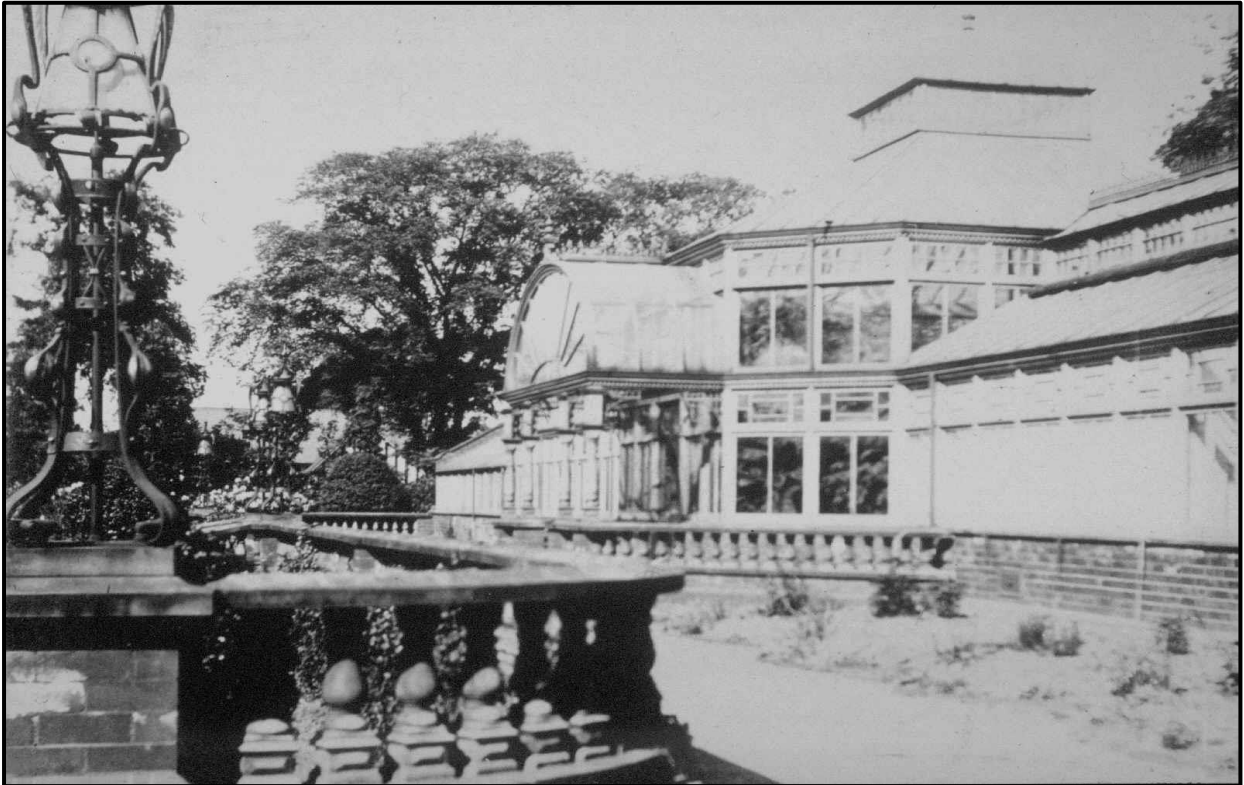
**Sorrento, Wake Green Road, Moseley, 1900.**



The house was set well back from the road and fronted by an expansive lawn and a wide sweeping gravel drive that denoted the carriage class and country houses. Romanesque windows on the third floor, large bay windows, tall Tudor chimneys, pointed Gothic gable ends, an impressive projecting porched and balconied entranceway and a large highly decorated side conservatory made the house architecturally fashionable. Houses like Sorrento had their own carriages which required coach houses, stables, harness rooms and loose boxes stables, and special male staff. The Adams family submitted a plan to extend the stables and add an engine room, which suggests they intended to put in electricity.

The garden was extensive.

**The Conservatory and Orangery, Sorrento, Moseley, 1899. <sup>1</sup>**



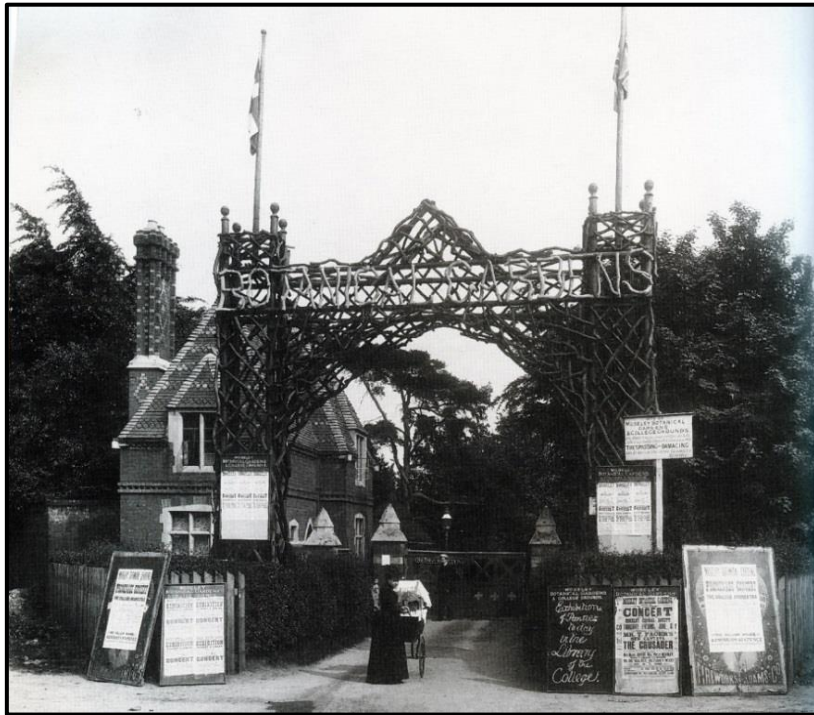
The image shows the terrace, decorative ironwork and balustrades, which reflect the influence of the 'Italian Garden' and later more formal designs. These included stone steps and vases, sundials, urns, and fountains, made from new materials such as concrete and older artificial materials such as Coade stone. The tennis court was just beyond the terrace, close to the house. Tennis was a popular game for both men and women and lawns were very important.

Conservatories and orangeries like this one were small-scale imitations of the plant-houses and orangeries of country estates that linked the house and garden. Enormous numbers of colourful new exotic species came to England from around the globe brought by plant travellers and horticulturalists and were preserved, grown, propagated and hybridised. Gardens and gardening became a middle-class enthusiasm and Horticultural Societies developed which held annual shows, such as the Moseley and Kings Heath Horticultural Show at Moseley Hall and the Annual Show at Highbury in 1883, when Joseph Chamberlain 'threw open' his greenhouses and conservatories.

---

<sup>1</sup> PCRC.

**Moseley Botanical Gardens, Wake Green Road, Moseley.<sup>2</sup>**



In the 1890s Moseley had its own Botanical Gardens on the corner of Wake Green and College Roads in the grounds of Pine Dell Hydropathic Establishment which had extensive and varied garden areas and large and small greenhouses holding rare plants.

**Access to the Rear Garden, Sorrento, 1899.<sup>3</sup>**

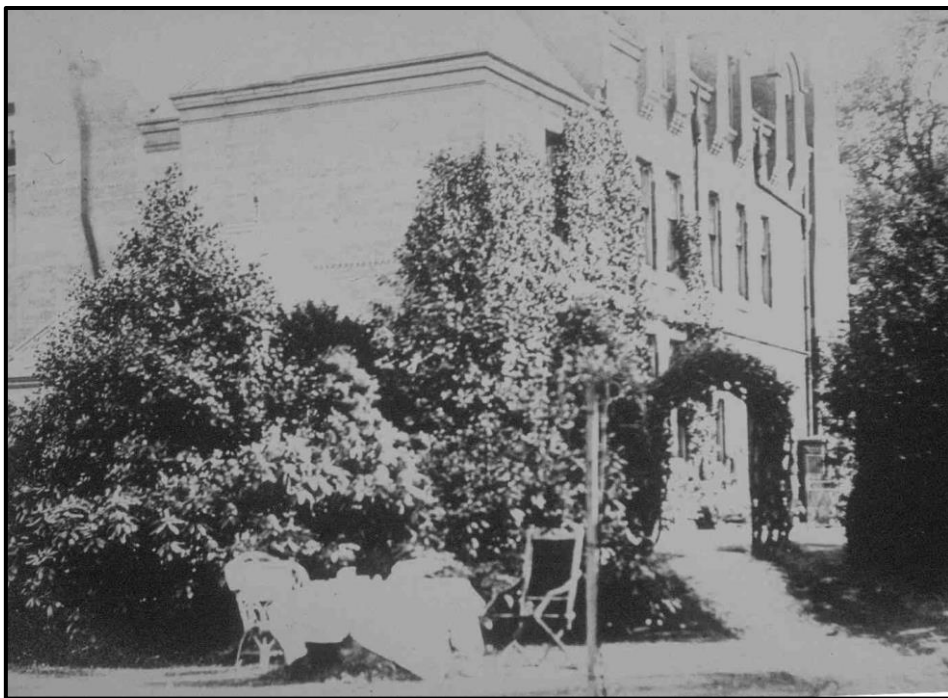


<sup>2</sup> MSHGC, (C3/D1/F11/Old Brum2), Newspaper Photograph.

<sup>3</sup> PCRC.

A rustic arch led from the side of the house to the rear garden. Rustic seats, trellises, arches and bridges, were part of the vernacular cottage garden and were very fashionable, harking back to a simpler time before the industrial revolution. Bedding-out plants run along the garden edge. Bedding-out was a key Victorian garden fashion that brought to gardens huge amounts of bright and previously unknown colour.

#### **Tea in the Garden, Sorrento, 1899.<sup>4</sup>**



Tea is set out on the lawn just inside the trellis arch. The table is set with a crisp white linen tablecloth and the image shows the side view of the house. The trees and shrubs ensure the family's privacy. Lawns were an important Victorian feature and made possible by the development of lawn mowers by Edwin Beard Budding, an engineer from Stroud, Gloucestershire in 1830. By 1900, petrol-engine mowers were market winners.

Wide, dry gravel paths linked garden designs and provided convenient private walkways for the family and guests, especially female members. They were straight to meet the demands of the formal garden at Sorrento.

---

<sup>4</sup> PCRC.

**A long Straight Path, the Rear Garden, Sorrento, 1899.<sup>5</sup>**



The house was replaced by Sorrento Court, a retirement housing complex, in 1996 and new houses were built on the garden.

**Janet Berry**

See more images and details about gardens, gardening design and gardening and sources on the Moseley Society website. [moseley-society/local-history.org.uk](http://moseley-society/local-history.org.uk)

---

<sup>5</sup> PCRC.