



History of Lawnswood House and the Roe Deer

A History of Lawnswood House

The Roe Deer started life as a family home known as Lawnswood House.

The Lawnswood House estate occupies a wonderful position in an area of unspoilt countryside just off the main Kidderminster to Wolverhampton A449 road, approximately 1½ miles north of Stourton and west of Stourbridge. The house stands proudly in an elevated position with an outlook over parkland and fields beyond.

Lawnswood House was commissioned by the Foley family and built in the Regency style by Messrs Firmstone of Stourbridge between 1813 and 1816, during the reign of King George III. Edward Foley made his fortune producing iron in the mid 17th century and the coal for smelting was provided by the Dudley family, whose seat was at Himley Hall, close by to Lawnswood. Indeed, the Dudley family had close connections with the Foley family and the Earl of Dudley bought Witley Court in 1835 which was previously the seat of Lord Foley.

Edward Foley was the second son of Thomas Foley, third Baron Foley and Henrietta Stanhope.



Thomas Foley. Second Baron Foley. Edward's grandfather.

Thomas Foley became third Baron Foley on the death of his father in 1793. He was able to take his seat in the House of Lords on his 21st birthday in 1801. When the Whigs came to power under Lord Grey in 1830, Foley was appointed Captain of the Honourable Corps of Gentlemen Pensioners, a post he held until his early death in 1833.

In addition to his parliamentary duties, he was very active in local activities, notably as Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire between 1831 and 1833 and Master of the Quorn Hunt from 1805 to 1806.

Following the Foley's ownership, Colonel Fletcher purchased Lawneswood House (then spelt with an 'e') for £3000 in 1851. The Fletchers have a 500-year-old unbroken tradition, still upheld to this day, of using Thomas as the name of every first born male in the family. Colonel Thomas Fletcher was the first to rise to great fortunes, building on the momentum created by his father who had inherited mining land in Tipton by marriage.

Colonel Fletcher had already established himself in a law practice by the time he married his wife Jane. He was later to become captain in the Queens Own First Staffordshire Militia and one of the Earl Marshal's Gold Staff Officers present at the coronation of Her Majesty Queen Victoria. Both he and his wife shared a love of collecting fossils which were abundant in the many canal excavations in the district. He became the founding member of the Dudley and Midland Geological Society amassing a considerable collection over the years which was later sold to Cambridge University.

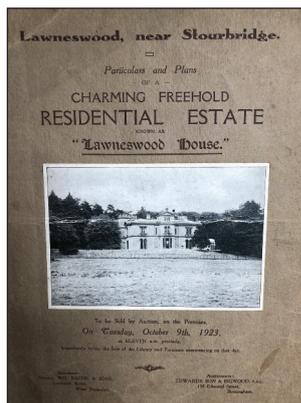
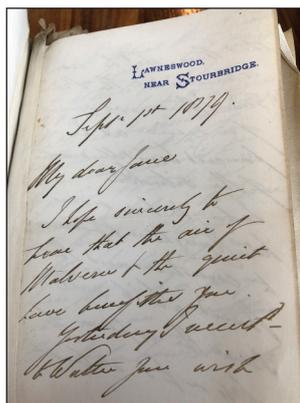


Thomas William Fletcher



Jane Maria Fletcher

Colonel Fletcher was a prolific letter writer, thankfully most of which have been preserved so we can follow the story of his families lives; his shock at his beloved son and heir Thomas, who had gone to Canada with the army, unexpectedly married a 16 year-old there, followed by his later acceptance as his daughter-in-law won him over and then his heartbreak as both his son and new wife were drowned less than a year later. Colonel Fletcher then turned his attention to his second son Walter, but he felt he fell short of the mark and so it was Eliza, his daughter that the house was passed to after their deaths and she continued to live in it until her death in 1923. The house was then sold for £5000 and all of its contents auctioned off over a four-day sale.



Jack Bean, who was famous for the manufacture of the Bean car, then purchased it in the early 1900's.

Bean Cars was a brand of motor vehicle made in England by A. Harper Sons & Bean Ltd at factories in Dudley, Worcestershire, and Coseley, Staffordshire. The company began making cars in 1919 and diversified into light commercial vehicles in 1924. For a few years in the early 1920s Bean outsold both Austin and Morris.

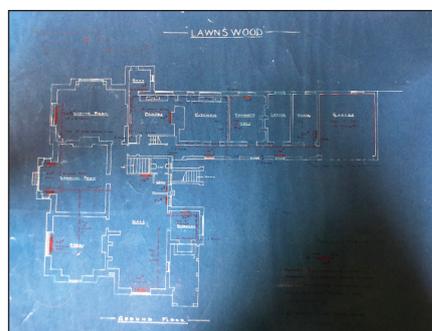


Bean suffered financial difficulties and was taken over by the steel-maker Hadfields Limited in 1926. The launch of an under-developed new model in 1928 worsened sales leading to the end of production 1929. Hadfields continued Bean commercial vehicle production as "Bean New Era" until June 1931. In 1933 Hadfield re-launched the company as Beans Industries, making components for other motor vehicle manufacturers.

It was during the 'Bean period' that many changes are likely to have been undertaken to the building, most probably in the late 1920s.

Blueprints found from 1924 show that the entrance hall had been extensively altered, which is something that we have now corrected. The principal staircase from the ground to first floor would have been a most impressive architectural feature but was removed and replaced with a Neo-Tudor staircase. This incorporated barley twist balusters and a standard rail which were all very much in style in the 1920s. The plan has been affected by the installation of the replacement stairs, resulting in the original landing now being a back closet room. These spaces have also seen the removal of the original fireplaces, and the reconfiguration of some original room proportions for the installation of bathrooms.

Extensive changes were also undertaken to the servants' wing, particularly at ground floor level, resulting in all the rooms, bar one of the larders, losing their original proportions and fireplaces. This has also had an impact externally due to the removal and reconfiguration of the original fenestration pattern.



Blueprint of Lawneswood House

Mr Bean certainly made his mark on the building and after his demise the building passed to John Marsh in 1966. The Marsh family were the founders of the meat business of Marsh and Baxter.

The company was founded by Alfred Marsh, who bought a pork butchers' shop in High Street, Brierley Hill in 1867. In 1871 he established a ham curing and sausage manufacturing business in one shop with slaughtering facilities nearby in Brierley Hill.



Marsh & Baxter butchers' shop in Brierley Hill

By 1912, Marsh had bought the old factory of A.R. Baxter of Dale End, Birmingham. Alfred Marsh died in 1918 and the company prospered until it was taken over in 1962 by Falstock Marketing Corporation. Following this, John Marsh bought Lawneswood House and the property stayed within the Marsh family for nearly 50 years.

With great thanks to David Fletcher for his insights into his family history.