



History of the Mallard and Tidbury Green

Tidbury Green sits at the highest point in the whole of the Solihull borough, 154 metres up, which is why the snow always seems to linger here a little longer than everywhere else. It grew up as a scattered farming settlement around a crossroads linking south Birmingham, Earlswood, Grimes Hill and south Warwickshire. It stayed that way for the best part of 600 years before the 1930s brought the first real wave of housing along Fulford Hall Road, Tilehouse Lane, Lowbrook Lane and Norton Lane. The heavy boulder clay under our feet, dumped here by the last Ice Age some 10,000 years ago, made the ground notoriously hard-going to dig – and, appropriately for a pub named after a duck, notoriously good at holding water.



Ordnance Survey map of Tidbury Green, 1899

The name itself is thought to go back to a man called Stephen Tyberes, or Tybray, who in the reign of Edward III gave a piece of land 'in the Market Town of Solihull, with a building' to the townsfolk – exactly why is lost to time, but his name seems to have stuck to this corner of the parish ever since. Solihull itself, a few miles up the road, has a pleasingly blunt name of its own: it most likely derives from the Old English *sol hyll*, meaning simply 'muddy hill', after the claggy clayland along the old Warwick Road that turned to a quagmire every winter. Solihull barely registered at the Domesday survey of 1086, recorded only as the small manors of Ulverlei and Longdon, and it was the founding of St Alphege's Church around 1220 and a market charter in 1242 that really put the town on the map. Blacksmithing became its great trade, forging tools and weapons and clearing the woodland for fuel as it went.

History of Tidbury Green

At the turn of the 20th century, Tidbury Green was, in effect, this farm and little else besides – a scattering of fields and farmhouses at a country crossroads, with the nearest thing to a settlement being a scatter of cottages and the farms that surrounded them. Ownership of Tidbury Green Farm itself passed down through just two families for the best part of two centuries: the Roberts family held it through the 1700s and into the early 1800s, before it passed into the hands of Henry Aylesbury Walker Aylesbury, whose own family kept it until his death in 1905 and the farm's eventual sale in 1917.

The green really only became a village in the modern sense from the 1930s onwards, as houses were built out along Fulford Hall Road and the surrounding lanes. It has grown steadily, ever since; the civil parish was recorded as home to 1,130 people at the 2011 census.

After the Second World War the area supported a thriving Vegetable Growers Association, a reminder that market gardening, alongside dairy farming, was very much part of local life.



Tidbury Green School opened its doors in 1931 to 100 pupils, survived a closure scare in 1981, and was entirely rebuilt on a new site in 1995 with room for 500 children – alongside a new village hall that finally gave Tidbury Green's clubs and societies a proper home of their own. For a place that spent 600 years as a handful of farms around a crossroads, it has done rather a lot of catching up in the last century.

A working farm since the 1600s

Long before it was ours, this was Tidbury Green Farm, and it has been worked as a farm since at least the 17th century. The farmhouse is Grade II listed, described by Historic England as 'a good and substantially complete example of vernacular farm building': red brick under a steeply-pitched, plain clay tile roof, with an L-shaped range and a cross-wing tucked into the angle between them. Look up at the porch and you'll see a gabled timber canopy with pierced barge boards; look inside and there's a 17th-century inglenook fireplace complete with its own smoking chamber and spice cupboard, huge chamfered ceiling beams on both floors, a flagstone-floored cellar half sunk below ground, and, tucked in the attic, an old cheese room that still shows the marks of its original shelving.



17th-century inglenook fireplace

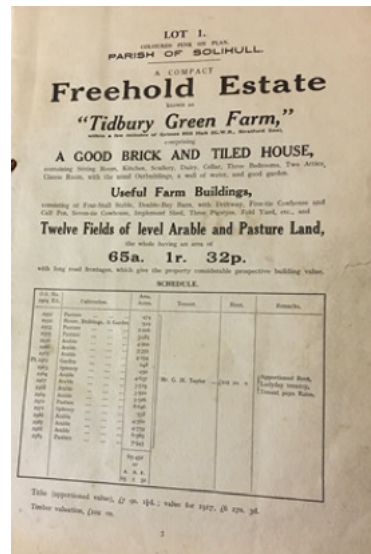
The farmhouse never worked alone. Grouped around its courtyard are a threshing barn and stable block dating from the first half of the 19th century, complete with cobbled threshing floor and timber mangers, along with a separately listed cowhouse and a row of pigsties – between them a small, remarkably complete working farmstead, all individually Grade II listed by Historic England for their historic and architectural interest.



A farm sale in 1917

After Aylesbury's death the farm stayed part of the family estate for a few years more, let out to a tenant, until the disruption of the First World War finally brought about a sale. In 1917 the farm was put up for auction and bought outright by the very tenant farmer who had been working it.

The sale particulars still survive, and they paint a lovely picture of exactly what a working Warwickshire farm looked like a little over a hundred years ago – 'a good brick and tiled house



containing sitting room, kitchen, scullery, dairy, cellar, three bedrooms, two attics, cheese room', a well of water and a good garden, set among 'four-stall stable, double-bay barn with driftway, five-tie cowhouse and calf pen, seven-tie cowhouse, implement shed, three pigsties, fold yard etc', and twelve fields of arable and pasture land.

This was, in other words, a proper working dairy and mixed farm, and it stayed one for decades afterwards. The old dairy, with its arcaded brick plinths for keeping churns and pans cool, still survives, and one of the cowhouses still carries the maker's plaque from a Fullwood milking machine – a sign that even this small farm kept up with mechanisation as the 20th century went on.

Upstairs, the attic cheese room with its lime-ash floor tells the same story from the other end of the process: milk in at the dairy, cheese out from the attic, the whole business of a self-sufficient farm carried on within these same walls. The farm did not entirely escape the wider world, either – during the Second World War a stray bomb landed just to the east of the farmhouse, and the shockwave brought down the eastern gable's chimney stack, which had to be rebuilt not long after.

Why the Mallard?

We didn't have to look far for our own name. The first thing you see as you approach is the duck pond in front of the farmhouse, and on it, more often than not, a mallard or two – so The Mallard it is. Ponds like ours were never just decorative: for a working farm like this one they served for generations as a watering hole for livestock and a reliable water source close to the house, exactly the sort of practical feature that quietly keeps a farm like this running for three hundred years.

From an Aylesbury family estate, to a tenant farmer's own dairy farm bought at auction in 1917, to now, The Mallard – the next chapter in this beautiful building's life.