

An Introduction

In 1999 the idea of having a community garden for Wolverton was suggested. The site was the derelict piece of land opposite the site of the old station on the Stratford Road, alongside the Grand Union Canal.

We all thought it a wonderful area and with the high walls behind, it soon acquired the title of 'The Secret Garden' (here's a clue to the books we were into as children). The remains of the original iron boundary fencing could still be seen. There was a lovely selection of trees including mature horse chestnuts. In the Spring the primroses, violets and bluebells under the fresh green tree canopy made it a very special place. You could watch the canal boats or trains going past, but it still felt peaceful.

Wolverton Society for Arts & Heritage members, together with the Town Council, set about making the dream a reality. The owners of the land, Network Rail, were approached and they agreed to sell it for £1 to Town Council as long as it remained as a garden in perpetuity.

The Countryside Agency's Doorstep Green scheme gave us money for a feasibility study and Neil Higson of Landscape Town & Country was commissioned to draw up some alternative designs. These were used as the basis for an extensive public consultation and the final plan was decided upon.

Another round of fundraising was started to make the dream a reality. The first activity was the research and excavation of two of the villas that originally stood on the site.

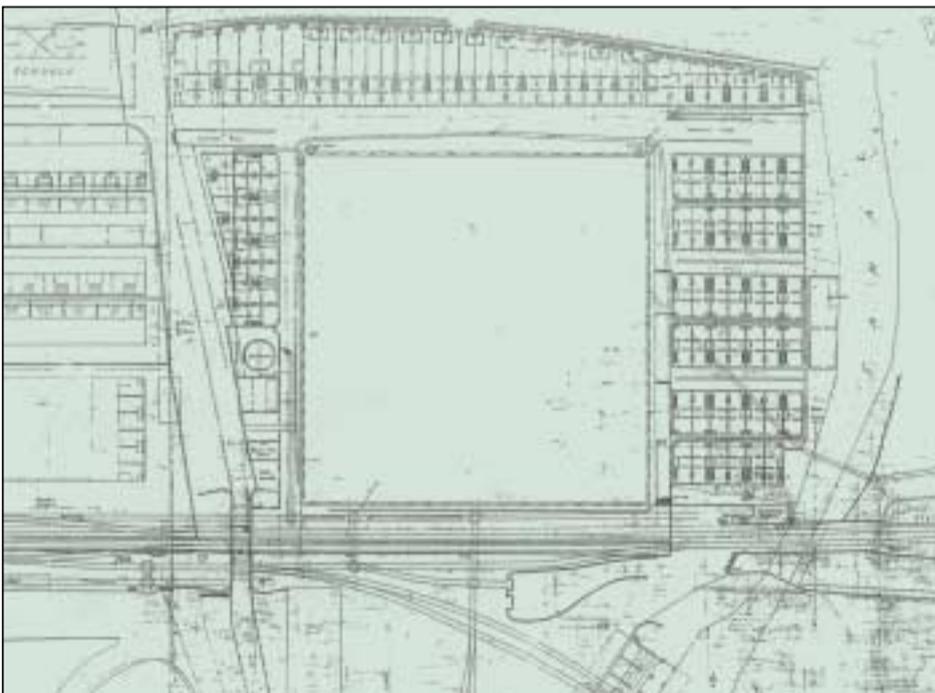
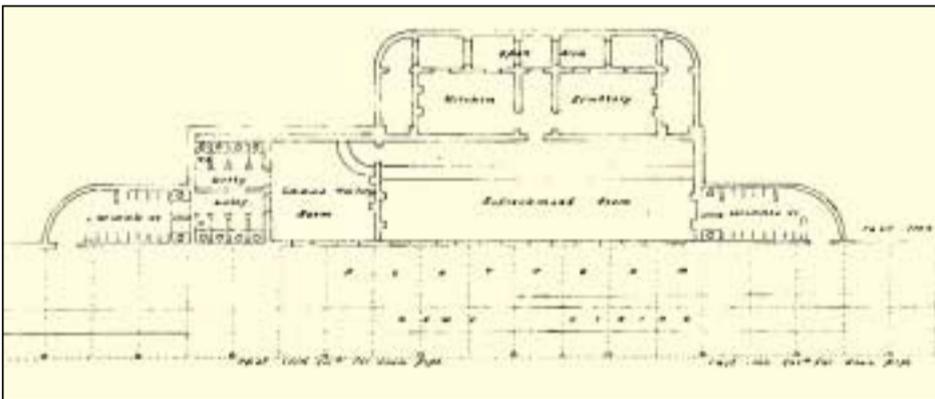
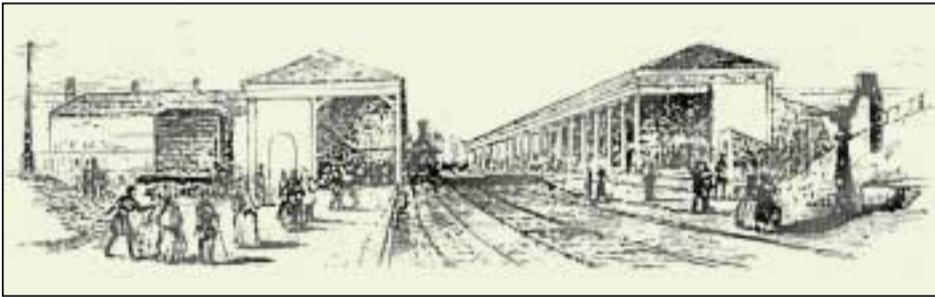
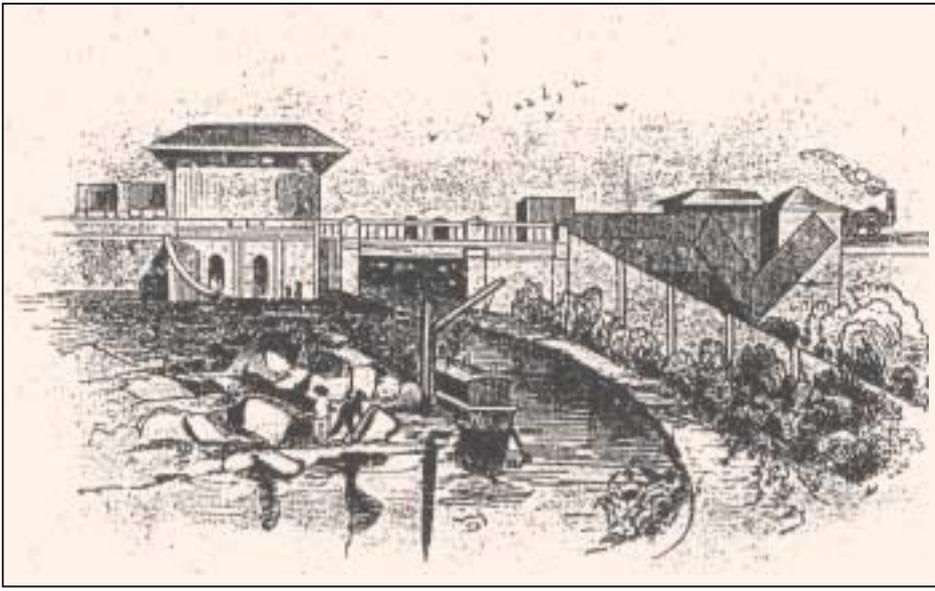
Funding was secured from the Local Heritage Initiative in 2003. This enabled children and their teachers from Year 7 at Bushfield School to carry out research into the history of the villas and then to work with professional archaeologists on an excavation of the site. Adults had a go at weekends. There was also funding to recreate the villa footprints as gardens, plant a cherry orchard, install an interpretation panel and create this exhibition.

We would like to thank Milton Keynes Museum, the Living Archive, former residents of the villas and local people for their generous help in the research of this project.



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The birth of Wolverton

When Robert Stephenson was building the railway line from London to Birmingham he needed to find a convenient place about half way along the line where the trains could stop.

The 100 mile journey between the two cities in those early days took 4 hours. Engines needed to be changed half way and passengers needed a place to refresh and relieve themselves on their journey.

Wolverton was chosen as the site for the world's first 'grand central station' and refreshment room. Storage and servicing for locomotives was included. In September 1838 the first train ran along the new line.

The Railway Company also decided to build a Locomotive and Carriage Works here. The new rail line conveniently bisected the Grand Union Canal at Wolverton which meant that building supplies could be easily transported to the site by barge.

As the population grew to carry out these tasks, so did the town. The first housing for labourers and craftsmen was back to back and clustered around the 'Square' – the new Locomotive Works - where Tesco's car park is now. This new town was called Wolverton Station

The new workers brought their families and the Railway Company built a school (on the corner of Creed Street and Stratford Road) to educate their children. They also gave money for the building of St George's Church.

The Railway became busier and the first station (on the site where the old Royal Train Shed now stands) was moved and a new Refreshment Room was built (near to O'Connell Drive at the back of the Telephone Exchange) It became famous throughout the land.

In the 1840's the Refreshment Room employed:

1. A matron or generalissima
 2. Seven very young ladies to wait upon the passengers.
 3. Four men and three boys to wait upon the passengers.
 4. One man-cook, his kitchen-maid and his two scullery maids
 5. Two housemaids
 6. One still-room maid, employed solely in the liquid duty of making tea and coffee
 7. Two laundry maids
 8. One baker and one baker's boy
 9. One garden boy
- And finally
10. An odd man – whatever that means!

Look at the quantities that were consumed in an average year in the Refreshment Room:

182,500 Banbury cakes
 56,940 Queen cakes
 29,200 patés
 36,500lbs of flour
 13,140lbs of butter
 2,920lbs of coffee
 43,800lbs of meat
 5,110lbs of currants
 1,277lbs of tea
 5,840lbs of loaf sugar
 5,110lbs of moist sugar
 16,245 quarts of milk
 1,095 quarts of cream
 8,088 bottles of lemonade
 10,146 bottles of soda water
 45,012 bottles of stout
 25,692 bottles of ale
 5,208 bottles of ginger beer
 547 bottles of port
 2095 bottles of sherry
 666 bottles of gin
 464 bottles of rum
 2,392 bottles of brandy

There were also 85 pigs, who ended up as pork pies!

(Source: Francis Bond Head; Stokers & Pokers 1849)





Housing for clerical and management staff

The London & Birmingham Railway Company needed to provide not just housing for its labourers and craftsmen. It also wanted to provide 'superior' housing for key managers and other important Railway Company staff.

The site chosen for this housing was to the east of the new (2nd) Station and Refreshment Room and alongside the canal. In 1841 Messrs Guyther & Co. won a tender to construct 4 Clerks' Villas on this site. They cost £393 10s each. They were let for £18 per annum.

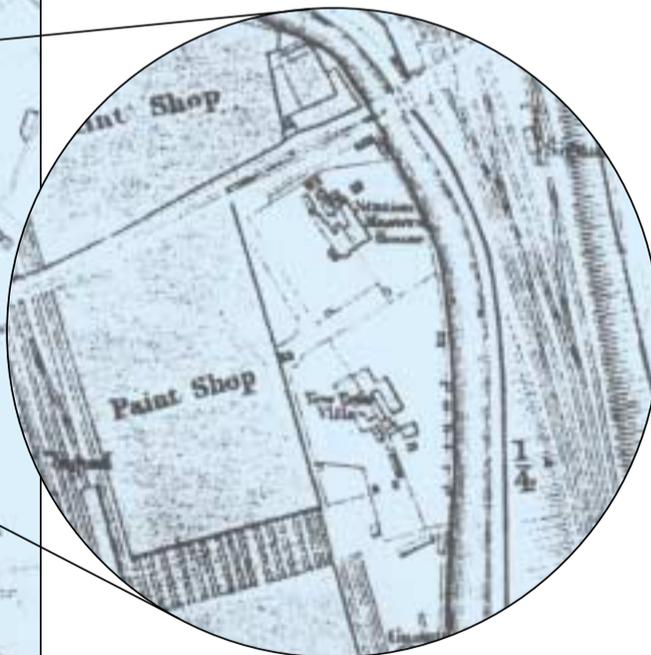
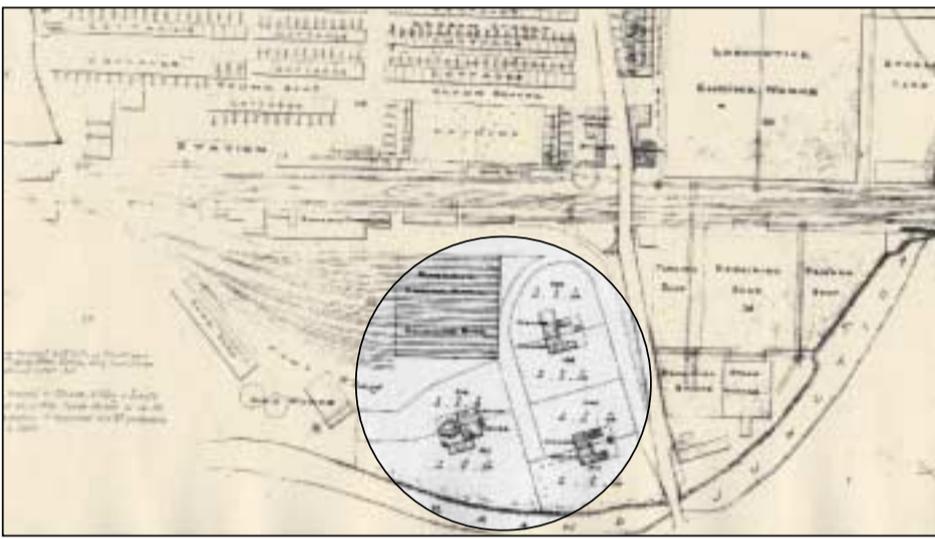
The remaining two villas on the south of the site were built shortly afterwards by James Andrews of Tring. They cost £1,045 for the pair.

The tenants paid rates and rent but the Railway Company awarded an allowance of £5 to the first tenants. This was intended to cover the expenses involved in putting their gardens in order.

One of the houses, later called *The Limes*, was always the house for the Wolverton Stationmaster, a very important figure in the town in those days. *The Firs* was the house of the Company Doctor and had a surgery and waiting room. Other key members of the Railway Works management, such as the Works Accountant, lived in the other houses.

Two of the houses did not last long. The Railway Works was growing fast and by the 1880's the main railway line had been diverted and the station moved yet again to the bridge on Stratford Road. A huge new Paint Shop was built and two of the original villas were demolished to make way for it.

The four remaining villas were lived in until the late 1960's and were demolished when the site was acquired by Robert Maxwell MP for a proposed industrial development. The development never took place and the site became overgrown.





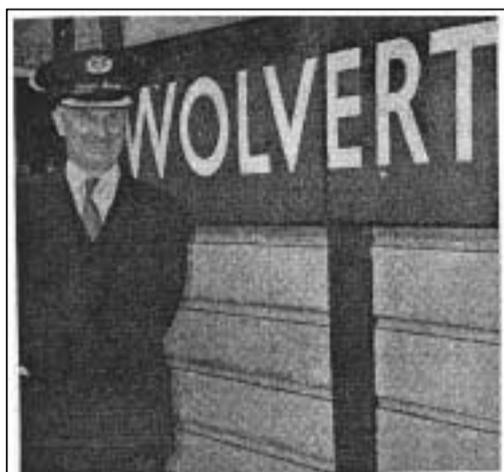
Uncovering the history of the villas

In 2003 pupils in Year 7 at Bushfield School, together with local residents, researched the history of the villas. With the help of maps, plans, census returns, photos and people's memories they learned more. They also worked with professional archaeologists Andy Richmond and Martin Lightfoot to excavate two of the villas – the Limes and the Hawthorns.

They discovered that archaeology is hard work! Lots of scraping with a trowel, lots of buckets and barrowloads of soil to remove and lots of time when you did not find anything exciting.

But many pieces of evidence of the past were discovered, particularly china, glass and metal fragments. They all helped to build up a picture of the past life in the Villas in Victorian and Edwardian times.





AFTER 130 YEARS

The town's last station master

FROM October 9, Wolverton, one of the first main line railway stations in the country, will have no station master. On that day Mr. John Hanson (57), who has held this office for the past nine years, becomes redundant. A senior clerk will be the main official and in charge will be Mr. Peter Fay, the area manager at Bletchley.

From the public's point of view the only difference is the loss of prestige. Wolverton, for all its long history, is now relegated to a station without a real hearted top official.

It was Wolverton that became the half-way stage in the London to Birmingham railway in the 1830s. It was here that Queen Victoria stayed at the refreshment room. Wolverton has always held an honoured place in the railway world and to be Wolverton's station master was a "plum" job.

Mr. Hanson is quite philosophical about the redundancy. But he had another shock recently when he found, almost overnight, that he had a new landlord.

Like many of his predecessors Mr. Hanson has lived in one of those enormous semi-detached houses by the canal that are probably the oldest dwellings in Wolverton. Mr. Hanson's home, "The Limes" still has the old London and Birmingham railway plate showing that it was the company's property No. 130.

The house, together with those of Mr. Owen Sabin (Chief Mechanical and Electrical Engineer's Chief Inspector) and Mr. E. Hammonds (ticket collector), have been bought by the local Labour MP, Mr. Robert Maxwell as part of his redundant workers deal with the Railways Board. With the exception of the Veterans' Institute and the Apprentices' School, Mr. Maxwell now owns all the old railway property south of Stratford Road.



Routes and Birmingham Railway.

GRAND DEPARTMENT.

RATES FOR CATTLE AND SHEEP.

From	To	per Wagon	2	1	1
From Birmingham to London	per Wagon	2	0	0	
Covestry	ditto	2	0	0	
Banbury	ditto	2	10	0	
Bagby	ditto	2	10	0	
Wooden	ditto	2	5	0	
Boole	ditto	2	0	0	
Wolverton	ditto	1	15	0	
Leigham	ditto	1	10	0	
Aylmery	ditto	1	10	0	
Tring	ditto	1	5	0	
Beaconsfield	ditto	1	0	0	
Welford	ditto	0	15	0	
Harrow	ditto	0	15	0	
From Coventry to Birmingham	per Wagon	0	10	0	
Banbury	ditto	0	10	0	
Bagby	ditto	1	0	0	
Wooden	ditto	1	10	0	
Boole	ditto	2	0	0	
Wolverton	ditto	2	0	0	
Leigham	ditto	2	5	0	
Aylmery	ditto	2	10	0	
Tring	ditto	2	10	0	
Welford	ditto	2	15	0	
Harrow	ditto	2	15	0	

N.B. A Driver with Three Wagons to pass Free.

To prevent disappointment, it is requested that due notice be given for the supply of Wagons.

From Date, Nov. 21, 1900.

The Stationmasters

In the early days of the railway the Stationmaster was a very important figure in the town in Wolverton. The station, with its Refreshment Room was busy and important. The Stationmaster always lived in *The Limes*.

The first Stationmaster to live there was Alfred Blott. The Railway Company appointed him as Senior Clerk/ Stationmaster on September 18th 1838, the day after the final section of the railway opened. He was still there in 1851 as the Census reveals.

1851 Census		Age	Occupation	Where born
Alfred D BLOTT		33	Stationmaster	Westmoreland – Buxton
Cornelia L J BLOTT	Wife	25		Geneva, Switzerland
Lenoni W BLOTT	Son	5		Wolverton
Alfred V BLOTT	Son	3		Wolverton
Arthur A BLOTT	Son	2		Wolverton
Melbourne BLOTT	Son	6m		Wolverton

Although the Stationmaster's House was later known as *The Limes*, the census reveals that in 1871 it was known as Woodbine Villa when Joseph Parker was Stationmaster. In 1881 Edward Odell Bliss, who was born at Aspley Guise, was Stationmaster. By 1891 the house was now called *The Limes* and occupied by Robert Dunleavy and family. The 1901 Census shows that Thomas Brinnard from Burton in Westmoreland was Stationmaster. The 1911 Kelly's Directory says that Henry Brinklow was by now the Stationmaster.

Arthur Sabin was stationmaster from 1913 to 1928. His son was Owen Sabin and he moved there when he was just a year old.

Jack Hanson, the last stationmaster to live in *The Limes* moved here in 1958. He ceased to be Stationmaster in 1965 but stayed on living there until 1969.

Owen Sabin remembers that the station master was "supreme" in his own station. His father managed 3 booking clerks, 2 ticket collectors, 2 foreman, 4 porters and about 8 signalmen. In addition he was also responsible for working all the 'traffic' trains between the next station either way.

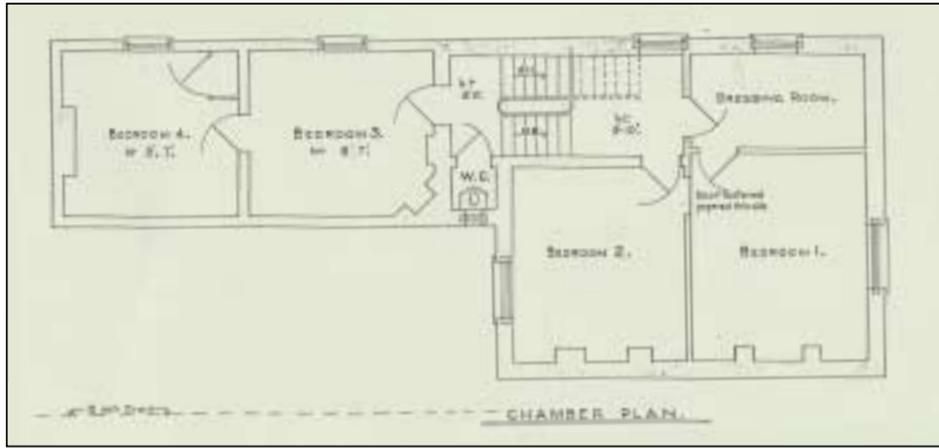
When Arthur Sabin was Stationmaster he wore a uniform with a peaked cap and frock coat with "lots of gold braid". Owen's mother made him trousers and jackets from his father's old frock coats.

"Socially the Stationmaster was like some sort of king. He was in one of the upper social classes. Over the years the Stationmaster's social position gradually diminished." (Owen Sabin)

"Wolverton used to be a far more important station than Bletchley because Bletchley was just a village. The Stationmaster wasn't as important as the Works Superintendent, but they were important because train was the only method of transport to get to far away places. The Stationmaster was ranked on the same social level as the headteacher of the local school and the vicar at the local church." (Jack Hanson)

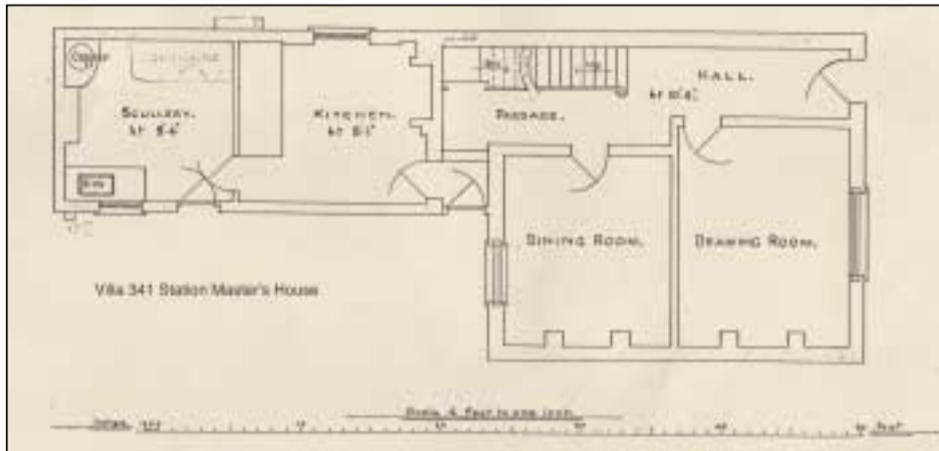


The Limes – The Stationmaster's House



Owen Sabin who lived in the Limes as a child when his father was Stationmaster between 1913 and 1928 remembers that the house had 9 rooms, including a small toilet and 5 bedrooms. One of the bedrooms was later turned into bathroom. Until then baths were taken in the back scullery.

Jack Hanson, the last stationmaster to live in the Limes remembered that the house was big and the passage running through the house had eleven doors coming off it and it took 19 rolls of wallpaper to paper it..



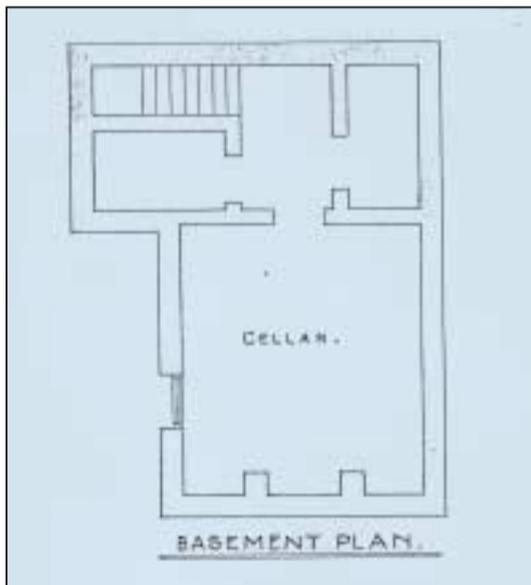
The Railway Company used to help decorate the houses, doing two rooms a year. "You had the Railway come along and do it in chocolate brown and cream – you didn't decorate, gosh!All I can remember is that they had a limited choice of wallpaper and had too much chocolate brown!" (Dot Anderson, née Hanson)

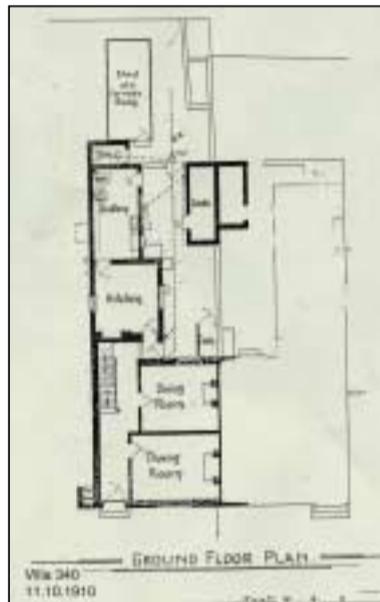
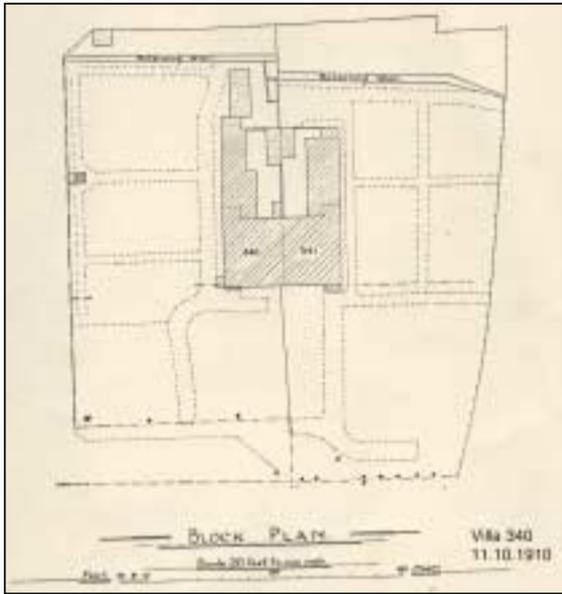
"We had a lot of old colours in that paint – they'd got stuff left over from doing the Royal Train, so that's what they used up on us" (Averil Sabin)

"The station master's houses always had big gardens to convince them to stay there and not to move anywhere else because they were on duty 24 hours a day. The station master at Castlethorpe and myself were on call alternate weeks. You were responsible for anything that went on on the railway during the time that you were on call. There were suicides on the railway. So you were responsible for the bodies. Some of the suicides were employees of the railway company. Prisoners sometimes jumped out of the prison trains to try and escape and this was also the stationmaster's responsibility. There were also derailments and failure of engines and so on." (Jack Hanson)

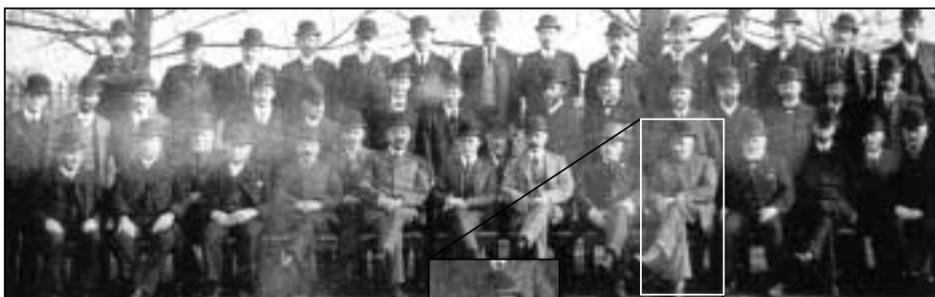
"It was lonely living by the railway especially in the Winter. Wasn't a very convenient place to live." (Dot Anderson née Hanson)

"My best friend lived in Ledsam Street which was one of the Little Streets and when I came down from the Grammar School I used to leave her there and then I used to have to go off on my own over the bridge and down the road. ... My sister said, 'I quite envied them in the Little Streets because they used to be able to play out and we'd always got to have to have this thing, 'Oh you've got to go home because you've got to get back home before it gets dark''". (Dot Anderson née Hanson)





Owen Sabin with dog 'Sally' in The Firs back garden. Tennis court is in the background. In the distance are The Hawthorns and The Limes.



Officers and Foreman L&NWR Carriage Works Wolverton November 1907

George Fitzsimons –
Chief Accountant
Wolverton Railway
Works 1907

The Hawthorns

Each of the houses owned by the London & Birmingham Railway Company was given an inventory number. Villa 340 was the adjoining house to The Limes (Villa 341). The 1871 census reveals it was known as *Myrtle Villa* but it later known as *The Hawthorns*.

For many of the early years in its life the house was occupied by the Railway Works Accountant. The first we learn about (via the 1851 Census) is Brabazon Stafford who was born in Dublin.

1851 Census		Age	Occupation	Where born
234/6				
Brabazon S. STAFFORD	Head	43	Accountant	DUB
Elizabeth STAFFORD	Wife	34		LND London
William A STAFFORD	Brot	39	Invalid no occ	DUB
Brabazon R STAFFORD	Son	7		BKM Stony Stratford
Anne STAFFORD	Dau	4		BKM Wolverton
Elizabeth D STAFFORD	Dau	3		BKM Wolverton
Mary J STAFFORD	Dau	1		BKM Wolverton
Emma BARRIDGE	Serv	22		NTH Cotterslock
Ann GREEN	Serv	20		NTH Cotterslock

1881 Census		Age	Occupation	Where born
Geo. M Fitzsimmons	Head	35	Accountant	LAN
Elizabeth PLANT	Servt	36	Sevt	HAM Hartley Westfield

The 1881 Census reveals that 35 year old bachelor George Fitzsimons (spelt wrongly as Fitzsimmons) the Works Accountant lived there with his housekeeper, who was still with him in 1891.

George Fitzsimons financial skills were used in other ways during his life in the town. The 1883 Kelly's Directory shows that GM Fitzsimons (Accountant LNWR Carriage Works) was an Insurance agent for Queen Insurance Co. and also secretary of LNWR Railway Co.'s Savings Bank (Kellys)

George was still living at the Hawthorns in 1901, but by now had a new housekeeper, who was born in Wolverton. The 1903 Kelly's Directory says that he was Secretary of the Wolverton (Bucks) Building Society Ltd, a post he still had in 1907.

Early housing in Wolverton was provided by the Railway Company. Some of the earliest housing – around the original Locomotive Works (The Square) and the Little Streets - has disappeared, but some of the later developments survive. In 1878, with the encouragement of the Railway Company, the Wolverton Permanent Building Society was established. It helped finance the expansion of Wolverton. House plots were sold in single or small parcels -not to big developers but to local people working in the town who took out loans from the Building Society.

In our excavations of the former dog kennel of the Hawthorns we found evidence of the life of the former occupants at the turn of the century. Some empty half champagne bottles, oyster shells and a gout ointment pot.... From this can we make assumptions about George Fitzsimons' lifestyle?





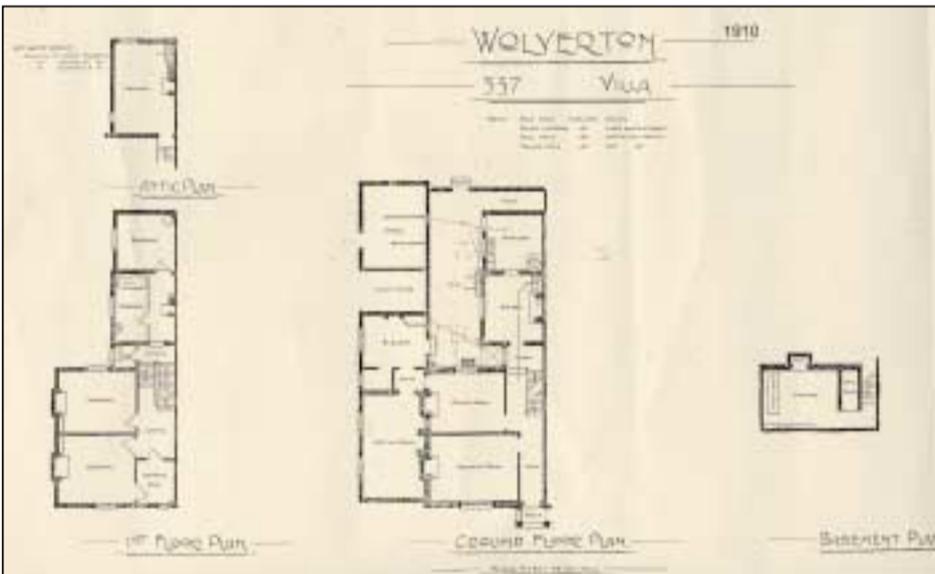
Betty Sabin holding Sally, on the tennis court at The Firs



George Cockings and Betty Sabin (nee Cockings) at the front of The Firs. Yew Tree House is also visible on the right. The building on the left called 'The School House' was an extension that was once the doctor's surgery. A yew tree hedge that gives the house its name is also visible on the right.



The Firs looking west from the tennis court



The Firs – The Doctor's House

Villa 337, later known as The Firs, was the biggest of the villas in the Secret Garden. It was originally the house for the Railway Company Doctor and his family. An extension was added after the original build to provide a surgery, dispensary and waiting room.

The earliest record we could find was an entry in the 1847 edition of Kelly's Directory that living in Wolverton at the time was William Rogers a Surgeon. He must have been very recently qualified because the 1851 Census reveals that he was only 30 years old in 1851. The household does not include details of a wife. Perhaps she was away visiting, but look later in the panel at the evidence from the 1871 census.

1851 Census	Age	Occupation	Where born
William ROGERS	30	MRCSL Surgeon	Kent
Matilda ROGERS Da	5		Wolverton
Maria ROGERS Da	4		Wolverton
William A ROGERS	So 2		Wolverton
Fanny ROGERS Da	9m		Wolverton

By 1861 William Rogers has moved on and Frederick Webster a 26 year old Surgeon from Markyate in Hertfordshire is living there with his 23 year old sister and a servant.

By 1871 William Rogers is back again, with a full household. But note the age of his wife and his eldest daughter. We can safely assume that Rosetta is not his first wife! Also note that by this time the house is called Canal Villa.

1871 Census	Age	Occupation	Where born
Canal Villa			
William ROGERS	49	Surgeon	Kent
Rosetta ROGERS Wife	34		Winslow Bucks
Isabella Fanny ROGERS Da	20		Wolverton
Girtrude ROGERS Da	17		France
Arthur L ROGERS So	11		Winslow
Henry H ROGERS So	9		Winslow
Agnes ROGERS Da	8		Wolverton
Constance ROGERS Da	7		Wolverton
Florence ROGERS Da	3		Wolverton
Lydia ROGERS Da	4m		Wolverton
Matilda MILLER Nurse	57	Nurse	Moulsoe
Janiell(?) BARTON	Servant 19	Servant	Gt. Linford

1881 Census	Age	Occupation	Where born
The Villas			
William Akid ROGERS	60	Surgeon	KEN Kelvenden
Rosetta ROGERS	44		Winslow
Henry Homer ROGERS	19		Winslow
Agnes Rose ROGERS	18		Winslow
Constance Rogers	17		Wolverton Station
Florence ROGERS	13		Wolverton Station
Lydia O Rogers	10		Wolverton Station
Jessica G.E. ROGERS	5		Wolverton Station

William Rogers is still living at the same place in 1881 but the 1887 edition of Kelly's Directory reveals that William David Symington MD CM – medical officer to the LNWR carriage works is living in Alma House – one of the earlier names for The Firs and this is confirmed in the 1891 Census.

1891 Census	Age	Occupation	Where born
Alma House			
William D SYMINGTON Head	34	Physician & Surgeon	BKM Aylesbury
Millie SYMINGTON Wife	34		BKM Princes Risborough
Louisa WHITNEY Servant	28	General Servant	Domestic CHS Nantwich

We know that Dr Symington kept a monkey because an entry in the Wolverton Works Fire Brigade log book talks of putting out a fire in the Monkey House at Dr Symington's property.

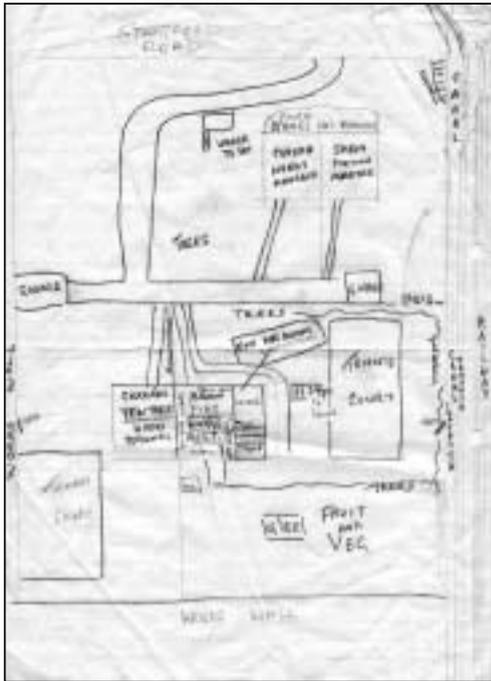
1901 Census	Age	Occupation	Where born
Alma House			
John W. HARVEY Head	27	Surgeon	Staffs Langley Green
Elizabeth W HARVEY Wife	23		Warwick Birmingham
Alice M CALLENDER Serv	20	Cook (Domestic)	London
Sarah H HEWENS (?) Serv	18	House parlourmaid	Warwick Tysoe

The last Works doctor to live in The Firs was Dr Harvey. He moved from there to a new house with dispensary, surgery and waiting room at The Elms in Green Lane.

Later occupants of the house usually held higher management positions in the Railway Works.

The last occupants to live there before the house was demolished was Owen Sabin and his family. Owen as a child had lived in the Limes, because his father was Stationmaster.





A map of the Villas drawn from memory by William Brown



A tennis party at The Firs (Frank Brown far left and Florence Brown 2nd right)



Tennis at The Firs. Back Row: Hubert Taylor, Bertie Hardy Front Row: Blanche Florence, May Brown (née Wildman), Beryl Taylor, Flo Taylor (to marry Hubert), Maisie Brown (to marry Bertie Hardy)



Inside the Drawing Room at The Firs. Left to right: Albert Wildman, Frank Brown Sr, Bert Wildman, Florence Brown, Frank Brown Jr, Frank Wildman.



Invoice for Frank Brown Junior's first car



Frank Harry Brown in the garden at The Firs



Frank Brown Jr's first car. Standing: Frank Brown Sr, Florence Brown. Seated: Flo Westley (née Brown and sister of Frank Brown Sr.)

The Firs 1930's

Walter Brown moved in as a child with his family in 1930 and lived there till 1939. His father was Works Accountant.

He recalls *"My delight as a youngster (especially when ill in bed) was watching and timing the named trains, which I could see from my attic bedroom"* These included at 11.00a.m, the Royal Scott (leaving Euston at 10.00a.m) and The Mid-day Scot and later the Night Scot.

The Canal provided extra attractions for watching *"the barges, always in pairs, for fishing and even swimming or sailing on an inflated car inner tube"*

Walter Brown recalls that the house *"Could be said to be 4 storeys as there was a huge cellar by stairway from a door just outside the kitchen and scullery. Large dining room under 2nd bedroom (Frank's), large front room, then the extension of lounge and small room (under front bedroom) with small dressing room over hall area. W.C and bathroom and Maisie's bedroom were over the kitchen and scullery. There another staircase took me up to my large attic bedroom with window overlooking the canal and railway and a 2nd window towards town"*

"Used to climb up the trees to cut down branches to provide logs for the winter fires. Can't recall Frank doing any of that! Mentioning fires, there was the big Works fire in the area adjoining the Gerrard's House (Yew Tree House)and we all went out in the night to help push the Royal Train to safety as it was kept there. Uncle Frank, who was Inspector of Catering on LMS dining cars always went on Royal joureys.

The Firs had a Tennis court - tennis parties were very fashionable at that time *"The tennis parties were usually when we had the crowd from Wembley or possibly even earlier, when they lived at Willesden. Of course, I used to have Molly Coker, Billy Gerrard, (not living at Yew Tree but related) Kath Fairburn, Lesley Gerrard and Bob Dunleavy for games."*

He also remembers the maid, Maggie, who walked over every day and earned about 5 shillings a week.



Yew Tree House – Webster’s Downfall



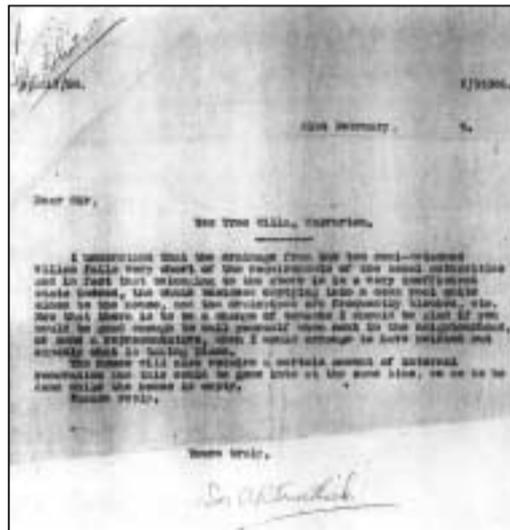
Sitting on Bench. Back: John Webster, William Robinson, Fred Webster. Front: Alice, Martha holding Bert, John William Webster, Gert Webster

Villa No. 336, at one time called *Primrose Villa*, and later *Yew Tree House* also housed senior people connected with the Railway and Railway Works. In 1851 John Bedford, the LNWR Superintendent of Police lived there with his family.

1851 Census		Age	Occupation	Where born
234/4				
John BEDFORD	Head	50	Supt Police LNR	YKS
Elizabeth BEDFORD	Wife	34	Superintendent's wife	NFK
John BEDFORD	Son	12	Scholl Boy	LND London
Benjamin BEDFORD	Son	11	School Boy	LND London
Mary BEDFORD	Dau	8	School Girl	BKM Wolverton
Helena BEDFORD	Dau	4	School Girl	BKM Wolverton
Sarah BEDFORD	Dau	2		BKM Wolverton
Maria BEDFORD	Dau	9m		BKM Wolverton
Rose LANDER	Serv	18	House Servant	GLS Tewkesbury
Elizabeth GARDENER	Serv	23	House Servant	OXF Banbury



Digging Potatoes. William Robinson, Fred, Gert and John, John William and Martha

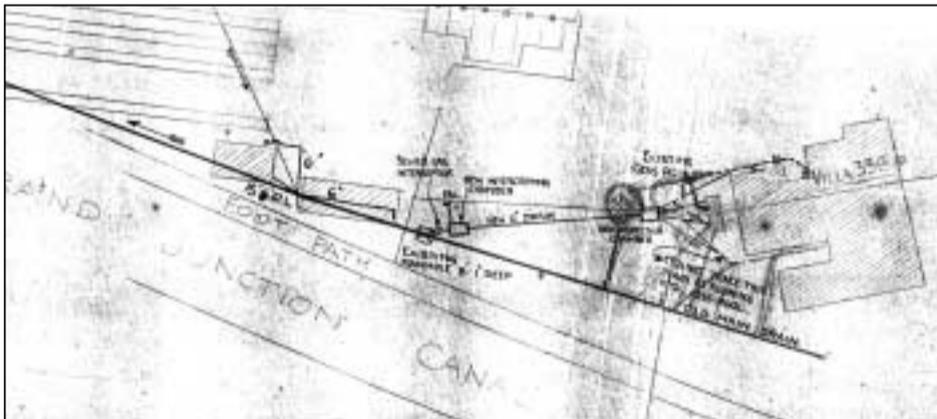


A letter to the Maintenance Depot at Rugby requesting improvements to the drainage system at Yew Tree House in 1919

In 1861 William Rowland, described as 'Engineer' lived there with his family and in 1871 Charles Davies a 57 year old Foreman in the Carriage Works lived there. His older sons worked in the Works as Draughtsman and Coachmakers. In 1881 William Panter, described as Manager Railway Works lived in the villa with his young family.

The most famous, (or should it be infamous!) occupant of Yew Tree House was John William Webster. He was born on 20th July 1856 in Haydock, Lancs. He was a Master Blacksmith and in 1881 was living in Skelmersdale, Lancs with his wife Elizabeth, daughter Edith, a 19 year old Blacksmith's apprentice and a 14 year old servant. In 1895 he was living in Newton-le-Willows. John's 7th child was born here. In 1902 he was living at 96 Cambridge Street, Wolverton. While living here his wife died.

In 1907 he was living at Yew Tree Villa, Wolverton Station. He had married for a second time and his wife Martha gave birth to their son Bert at the villa.



A plan of the suggested improvements to Yew Tree House's drainage in 1919

John Webster was considered to be a rather colourful character with a fiery temper. One typical incident he was involved in features in Bill West's book *Remember Wolverton, Stratford and Bradwell*. Under the heading "*Webster's downfall*" the following anecdote is recorded.

One of the fields at Stacey Hill Farm contained plants of a special seed pea, some of which were 8 or 9 feet high. One of the Webster sons brought home a handful of these special pods to show his father. John Webster decided that these had seed potential as they contained 12 to 14 peas per pod! He made a couple of forays to the field but got caught on the second trip. The farmer seized him, called for the police and locked Webster in the stable tackroom. Webster then flew into such a temper that he started slashing the harnesses. Consequently he was charged and convicted both with damaging harnesses and pea stealing. The peas were grown throughout the area and were known as "Webster's downfall".



John Webster died in 1934 at 22 Western Road, Wolverton.



The Finds – Part 2

The Euston Hotel Plate

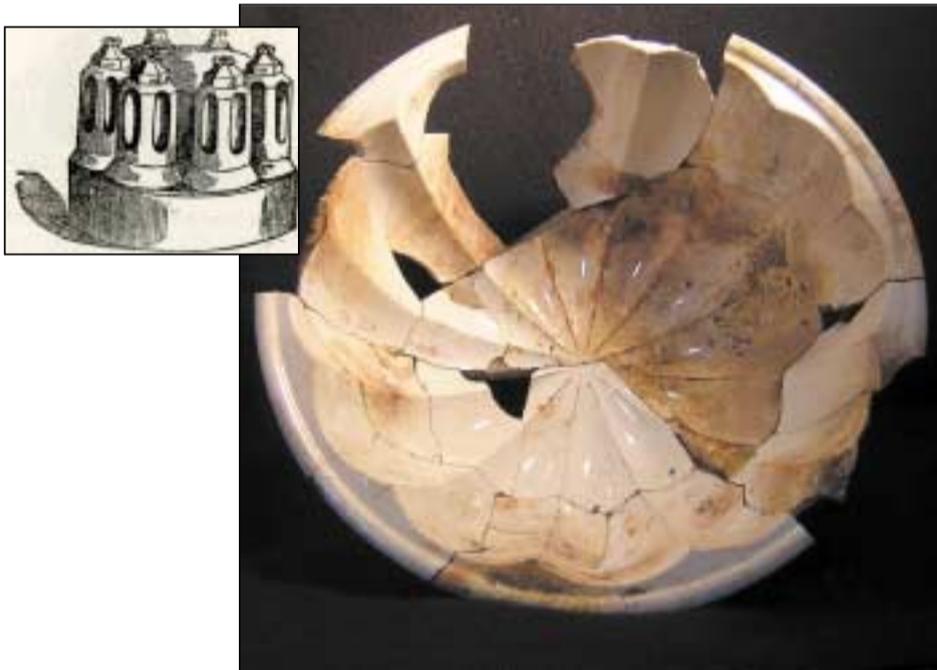


The "Euston Hotel Plate" is a favourite item from the Dig. We had been hoping to find pieces with a railway company connection. We found these pieces of blue and white china in the deep pit on the site, together with many other fragments of pottery. The picture is captioned "Euston Hotel" and shows a view of the hotel and also features the famous Euston Arch. Euston Hotel, was an LNWR Hotel built to get trade from Euston Station. This plate now has added nostalgia considering the unfortunate demolition of the Arch.

Euston Hotel did the catering for the V.I.P.s at the opening of Wolverton Park in 1885 - so there is an interesting local connection.

There are no markings of any kind on the back of the plate and it is very good quality. The floral border is quite unusual as many pictorial plates had much heavier, denser borders.

This is the only piece with railway connections that we have found so far. The occupants at the villas seemed to enjoy a pleasant lifestyle judging by the quality of their china, glasses and bottles, and the quantity of oyster shells!



The Jelly Mould

A very heavy jelly mould was found on the dig - although it has been very tricky to piece together!

Early jellies were complex and difficult to prepare and used a rather opaque crude gelatine. This needed highly skilled chefs to transform the mixture into an acceptable clear result. This meant that most jellies were savoury and only the really rich could enjoy sweet jellies. These desserts used honey for sweetening.

In 1846, a British patent records the manufacture of a powdered gelatine from which jellies could be prepared. This, however wouldn't meet food standards today! This did mean though, that jellies became much more available. This increased popularity meant that there was an increasing trend to have ornate moulded desserts. Many dinner party tables had an assortment of different shaped moulded jellies and creams. The early residents at the Villas would definitely have followed this fashion.



Mother of Pearl Gaming Token

Two of these interesting objects were found in the cellar and we were puzzled as to what they were used for!

Research showed that these were gaming tokens used in parlour games. They are Chinese and were produced between 1780 and 1810. They were commissioned by Europeans with numbers ranging from 1 to 1000. The decorative engraving on the front was carried out in the West, but the delicate cross hatched engraving could only be executed by the skilled Chinese.

These are the sort of items that probably ended up in the button box! Dot Anderson (née Hanson) who lived in the Limes as a child recalls playing with her mother's button box in the lounge where there was a mat and bare floorboards. Perhaps this token slipped down between the floorboards

