

# HIGH LAWN, BOWDON IN VICTORIAN TIMES

Ian Bryce



*The imposing High Lawn with its views across five counties  
(Ronald Trenbath & Bowdon History Society)*

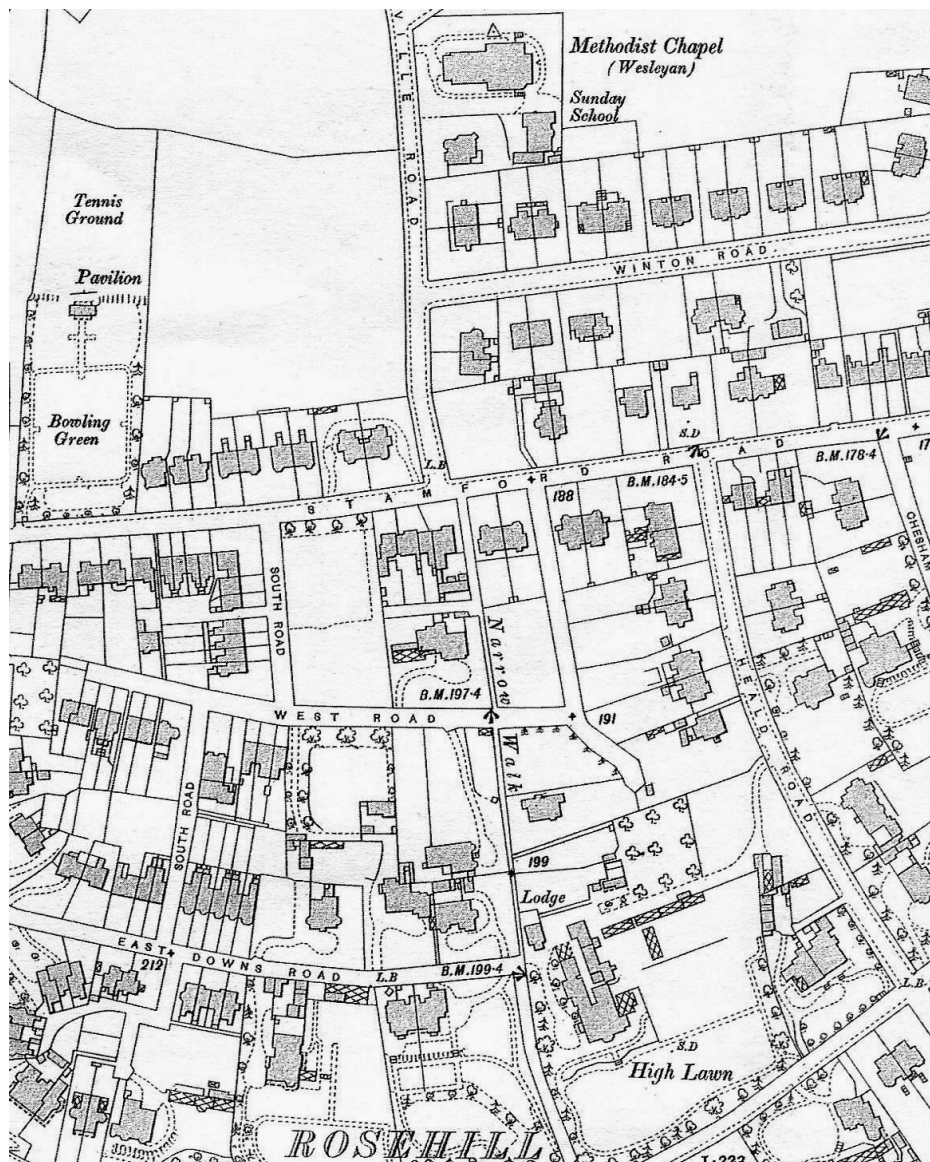


## *High Lawn, Bowdon*



*High Lawn, in 1876 (Altrincham Area Image Archive)*

*(N.B. Footbridge from front garden across to Dingle Bank East)*



*High Lawn bottom centre, in 1908, part of the area known as Rosehill*

### **High Lawn in Victorian times**

Since the 1840s the imposing presence of High Lawn has been a prominent feature the Bowdon skyline. Having lived in its original grounds for most of my life I have an enduring curiosity about the history of the building and the people who lived in it. Over the years I have gleaned a lot of information from various sources but only recently did it occur to me that some enjoyment might be had from consolidating it into a piece of writing. This was indeed the case, all the more so as the process of verifying my existing knowledge on the internet led me to material which augmented it and bridged some large gaps. What follows is a melange of known facts, hearsay, and my own conjecture. It does not purport to be a



complete history or a totally accurate account. Any additional information or corrections that the reader may have would be welcomed.

### **The house**

In the mid-nineteenth century the various owners of land on the southern downs of Bowdon realised it had potential for high-class housing due to its magnificent views over the Cheshire Plain. This, together with improved passenger transport, made it particularly attractive to the so-called “Cottontots”, i.e. newly-rich industrialists who wanted to live in an environment away from the dirt, grime and pollution which they had created. Typical of their number would have been William Neild, a calico printer from Ardwick, who bought a plot of land known as Daveys Lane Field in August 1841. By 1843 the land was occupied by a new mansion, High Lawn, in Grand Regency style. There was a lodge, gardener’s cottage, extensive stabling, coach house and a large glass canopy over a coach-washing area. It was the largest house in Rosehill, the development of houses which evolved on the ridge of Richmond Road and East Downs Road. The name is not in general use now, though it is still shown on some modern maps.

After the building was bought and remodelled by P J Livesey Developments Ltd some 145 years later, a sales brochure was produced mentioning that the house had been designed by the renowned Victorian architect Alfred Waterhouse. I was always sceptical of this statement, chiefly because, being born in 1830 he would have been 13 years of age when the house was completed and younger still when it was in the design stages. Moreover whilst he did not confine himself to any one particular style, the house was far removed from the ones for which he was best known.

P. J. LIVESEY DEVELOPMENTS  
FINE HOMES AND FURNITURE IN THE NORTH

H I G H L A W N B O W D O N  
A L T R I N C H A M C H E S H I R E



Set in a secluded corner of Cheshire, High Lawn is a Grade Two Listed Building designed by Alfred Waterhouse in 1840. This superb example of Victorian architecture has recently undergone an extensive scheme of refurbishment by P. J. Livesey Developments Ltd. The 8 individually designed apartments are finished to the highest standards and offer unparalleled views of the Cheshire countryside. These luxurious apartments range from 2,100 – 3,900 sq. ft. with prices starting at £265,000.

*P J Livesey's brochure for the remodelled High Lawn in 1988*

The facts reveal, however, that the house was built in the 1840s to the design of another architect, but Mr Waterhouse became a pupil of that architect several years later, eventually taking over his practice and going on to design major alterations to the house in the early 1860s.

The Victorian Society in Manchester lists High Lawn and the adjacent large semi-detached houses (Dingle Bank East and West) as all being designed in 1843 and the work of the neo-classicist architect Richard Lane, which might suggest that all three had been built in a similar style, but in the absence of any known recorded images, this remains a matter of speculation. Photography, then in its infancy, was an experimental hobby of a few rich men, one of whom happened to be Mr Neild's younger son, who collaborated with another calico printer Joseph Sidebotham. The Manchester Archives in the Central Library hold some of Mr Sidebotham's photograph collection in albums which can be viewed by appointment. The online list of contents includes one described as "High Lawn, Bowden, 1853, by A Neild" but the picture itself is only of the gardener's cottage at the rear. It is noteworthy that the cottage is shown to have been built in "Bowdon white brick" without a stucco finish, and, whilst proving



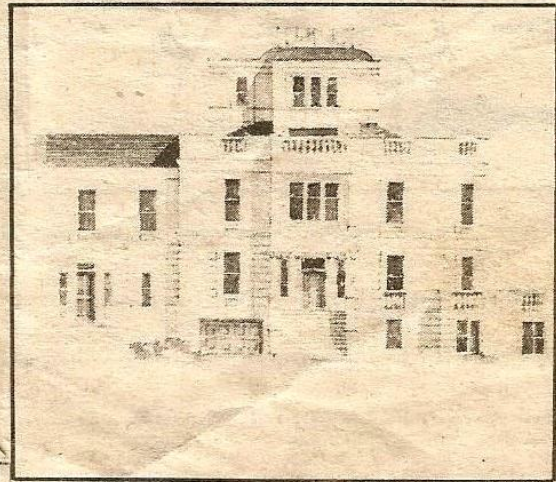
nothing, this does add weight to the theory that the main house had an appearance in keeping with the neighbouring ones.

Given that the grounds of the property encompassed the land on which Heald Drive and Heald Close were eventually built its positioning might seem odd i.e. less than 20 yards from the west boundary to East Downs Road and more than 120 yards from the east boundary with Heald Road. Would one not expect it to have been sited somewhere more central? The land is at its highest on the west side, but the actual reason is the fact that it comprised three separate plots, with the original one of four acres having been bought from Mr Thomas Assheton Smith and two additional ones having been added in the 1850s when more land became available for sale. Much of the land on the east side was owned by the Earls of Stamford, but the sixth earl stubbornly refused to release land for housing. After his death in 1845 this policy was changed by his successor, and this paved the way for a new wave of construction on Heald Road.

In the early 1850s a pair of semi-detached houses were built in Gothic Revival style on Langham Road, named Heald Bank, approximately 90 yards from the front of High Lawn, and only recently completely renovated.

The Messenger Friday June 24th 1988 - Page 11

**Des. Res.  
for sale -  
at £1½m**



IF YOU have a cool half a million pounds to spare, an apartment which could prove the ideal investment has just come on the market in Trafford.

Situated in a large Victorian house on East Downs Road in Bowdon, the penthouse suite at 'High Lawn' is reckoned to be the most expensive apartment outside London.

And agent's Prudential Property Services confidently expect the luxury flat to go for closer to £600,000!

So what can a flat-hunting millionaire expect for his cash?

Says the agent's blurb: "Reputed to be the highest residential point in Bowdon, the penthouse has a singularly unique feature in the shape of its Victorian Belvedere tower.

"From here, the prospective owner has a completely uninterrupted 360 degrees view over the whole of Cheshire and at least four other counties.

"The penthouse also has its own unique security and access which is provided by a specially designed key-operated system fitted into a glass-backed lift serving the apartments, and which also gives views over the Cheshire plain."

And for those of slightly more modest means, the house has seven other luxury apartments - going for slightly less but at a price the agents were not prepared to reveal.

• PICTURED is 'High Lawn', in East Downs Road, Bowdon... which houses the most expensive flat in the country outside London.

The Great Exhibition of 1851 had created a new fashion for the conservatory, as the well-to-do now wanted to have a miniature version of the Crystal Palace attached to their houses. Sure enough, the nearer of the two (later known as Monkton or Number 16) boasted one. Such an addition would not have been thought of in the previous decade when High Lawn was designed.

It is tempting to wonder how William Neild reacted to the construction of these new houses. Although built on lower ground and due East South East from the front of his property they would have slightly encroached on his much-coveted panoramic views. Might this have influenced his decision to buy up all the available adjacent land? If his objective was simply to preclude any further building taking place on that side he certainly achieved it, for a whole century was to pass before the land was developed.

High Lawn had been designed to be the grandest mansion in Bowdon, but its supremacy was now being challenged because the disposals of land by Earl Stamford in the 1850s that enabled its gardens to be enlarged had also opened up development along Green Walk, where some very impressive residences were being built. It is conceivable that the Neild family reacted to this by giving their home a makeover and adding some distinctive touches. The ledgers of Alfred Waterhouse show that in the 1860s he was building large houses in the area for sums between £3000 and £3500, and include one dated 1861 for “High Lawn – alterations to existing mansion” at a cost of £1880. It does not specify what those alterations were, but the cost clearly implies that they were very extensive. The consensus of thought is that the house was then completely remodelled in Italianate style, with rendered elevations (which were also applied to the lodge and cottage) and given its most distinctive feature by the construction of a belvedere on the roof. This had 360 degree views over five counties, and a translucent glass roof which in conjunction with a raised oval glass panel in the floor distributed light down the stairwell to the hall on the ground floor. This is redolent of designs by Waterhouse, whose public buildings tend to make the best possible use of natural daylight.



## **The Residents**

Mr Neild would have been in his early fifties when he bought the original land and commissioned the construction of High Lawn. It goes without saying that at the time he was a wealthy man, and by this time, apart from his conspicuous success in business he had also achieved eminence in civic life. Manchester was then still a town (prior to it gaining city status in 1853) and he served two terms as its second Mayor between 1840 and 1842. On closer examination he appears to have been a remarkable example of social mobility.

Born in January 1789, one of eight children, originally from Millington, near Rostherne, as a youth he came to Manchester in search of work and became an apprentice with Thomas Hoyle & Son at the Mayfield Printing Works in Ardwick. This was situated on Buxton Street, just off London Road, between Piccadilly station and where the Mancunian Way now crosses it. Thomas Hoyle, who came from an old Quaker family, had founded the business in 1782 on the site of a former country house, choosing it because he needed ready access to the water provided by the River Medlock. Hoyle mastered methods of printing colours, particularly purple, on to calico cloth. Purples were a huge technical challenge at the time, meaning the use of the colour was preserved for the rich and influential, particularly the clergy. Pushing the boundaries of the day's scientific knowledge, Hoyle's techniques made exquisitely patterned purple cloths available to the middle classes, and by creating one of the largest calico printing factories in the world he made his fortune.

Thomas Hoyle had a daughter and two sons, the younger of which died in infancy. The elder, also named Thomas, survived and was taken in as a partner, whereupon the business came to be known as Thomas Hoyle & Son. When he married there would surely have been expectations that a male heir would be produced to carry on the business and perpetuate the family name. Success eluded him in this, though it was not for the want of trying. Over a nine-year period his wife bore him six children, all of them girls and died the year after the arrival of the youngest. Two years later he remarried and in the next six years there were three more children, two girls and one boy named Thomas who only lived for 32 days. Eight years passed before there was another birth, possibly an unplanned pregnancy, but this resulted in yet another daughter, making nine in total out of which eight survived. Under the property laws that existed up to 1870, any

money made by a woman through wage, gift, investment or inheritance automatically became the property of her husband, once she was married.

In 1816, William Neild married Mary, who was the eldest of Mr Hoyle's daughters from the first marriage, in what might be seen as a good career move. Cynicism aside, it obviously did his prospects no harm. In 1817 one of Mary's younger sisters, Elizabeth, married Joseph Compton and in 1828, Lucy, the eldest daughter from the second marriage, married Alfred Binyon, a calenderer and coal merchant from another Quaker family. He was a great-nephew of a rich banker in Kendal who had provided the capital with which Arkwright had begun the cotton trade. On his death in 1834 Mr Hoyle made over the business to those three sons-in-law as partners. They were all then living in houses which adjoined the factory.

At the time of their marriage Mary would have been 28 and William 27. They lived in the Hoyle family house in Ardwick and within two years their first child, a boy named Thomas Hoyle Neild, was born. The choice of name may not have been entirely unpredictable, but it was perhaps not very auspicious, as he died 18 days short of his second birthday. They went on to have three more sons and four daughters, but only two of the sons and one of the daughters lived to see their third birthdays. The three who survived were named Alfred, Ellen and Arthur. At the time of the move to Bowdon their respective ages would have been approximately 20, 16 and 14.

The family cook Martha had been left behind in charge at the family house in Mayfield. The butler at High Lawn was a Mr Hamilton Breeze. There was also a Miss Elizabeth Thistlethwaite who was governess to the Neild children. The lodge was occupied by the coachman Jesse Circuit, who was frequently suspended for drunkenness and later reinstated, eventually being dismissed altogether. In what was described as "a pretty little house next to High Lawn" (possibly the cottage at the rear) there were two maids and, in the early years, some of Mrs Neild's relations.

One of Mary's sisters Susannah, seven years her junior, was the second wife of Dr John Atkinson Ransome, who was 15 years older than her. He was a senior surgeon at the Manchester Royal Infirmary and doctor to all the leading Quaker families. There was a tradition in his family that he had propounded the Atomic Theory and that John Dalton had made use of it

and got the credit. They lived in some style firstly in Manchester and later in Old Trafford but he died in 1837 leaving Susannah with two sons and four daughters, ranging in age from 12 to 1. After this her step-mother (Mr Hoyle's widow) and also Anna, her youngest and as yet unmarried half-sister, came to live with them, but in 1843 they appear to have fallen on straitened circumstances. By that time Mrs Hoyle had died, as had the youngest daughter. There were altogether six who moved to the cottage at High Lawn i.e. Susannah, the three remaining daughters, Anna and Miss Spencer, their governess. The eldest daughter was the same age as Ellen Neild and the two cousins were inseparable friends. Considering that there were also two maids it must have been very crowded in there, especially during holidays, when the two sons returned from their studies to stay. By 1846 both brothers had returned to Manchester and Mr Neild had persuaded the elder one, who would have been 21, to go into partnership with another man as a chemist. The rest of the Ransome family then moved to Manchester and it is possible that Mr Neild had provided some financial assistance with all of this. He was a good friend to Miss Spencer and provided her with help three years later when she returned to Bowdon to run a school.

Life went on at High Lawn. The vista from the front would probably have taken in the village of Millington and reminded Mr Neild that he had risen in the world in more ways than one. He was a notable commuter, travelling by coach every day to the factory in Mayfield. This is likely to have changed after 1849, when the railway between Altrincham and Manchester was opened. Prior to then the lower orders had commuted by barge from Broadheath. His partner and brother-in-law Alfred Binyon had bought a small estate at Grange-over-Sands and around 1850 built a magnificent mansion known as Merlewood. The calibre of their houses shows that the business appears to have been thriving. It became sufficiently important to be included in the itineraries of foreign dignitaries visiting Manchester, who marvelled at the production of a mile of calico print in an hour, a symbol of industrial achievement through technology. and Hoyles' machine-printed calicoes won several awards at the Great Exhibition of 1851.

Conditions for the factory workers were consistent with the Victorian age. The Factory act was introduced in 1847 establishing a 10-hour day for women and children. The owners of the Mayfield works argued to be



exempted from it on grounds that the work there fluctuated seasonally unlike the cotton mills where the demand was constant. When interviewed by a factory commissioner around that time Messrs Binyon and Neild disclosed that the regular working day was from 6am to 6pm with a half-hour break for breakfast at 8 and a full hour for lunch at 12. Frequently, though mostly during the Spring and Autumn, the working day could be up to 3 hours longer, making a total shift of 13½ hours, excluding break times, but unlike some calico factories there was no work at night or on Sundays. There were 229 employees including 28 boys and 13 girls, whose ages ranged from 8 to 13. The children's weekly wages were 2s 6d for learners and 3s 6d for those more experienced. For those too young to remember pre-decimal currency, these were the equivalent to 12½ and 17½ pence. The average room temperature in the factory was between 90 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit, though it could get as high as 112 degrees in the drying rooms.

Outside the business Mr Neild was active in a wide range of local affairs. He had been a member of the Manchester Anti Corn Law Association Council, of which the leading figure was Richard Cobden, Manchester businessman and another calico printer, and the outstanding orator John Bright. A Corn Law had first been introduced to Britain in 1804, when the landowners, who dominated parliament, sought to protect their profits by imposing a duty on imported corn. The legislation was hated by people in the fast-growing towns who had to pay higher bread prices as a result, and by manufacturers who had to pay their wages. Cobden had supported Mr Neild in his campaign to be elected Manchester's first mayor in 1838. In the event Mr Thomas Potter was successful, but Neild succeeded him two years later. The Corn laws were finally repealed in 1846.

Mr Neild had played a significant part in Manchester being given its mayoral charter, when in 1837 he refused to undergo the office of borough reeve, not considering, as he said, "that government any longer fit for a town of such importance as Manchester." The leet jury accordingly fined him £250 to the lord of the manor. A conference was held in his office and it was decided to start a petition for a charter. A meeting of ratepayers took place in 1838 and a resolution proposed by Cobden was carried with enthusiasm. A petition with 11,000 hands was forwarded to Parliament though there was a counter-petition from old Tories who did not consider change to be desirable. Commissioners were called in to investigate

allegations of mass duplicate signatures on the side of the antis, and on their favourable report the charter was passed and issued in October of that year, the first elections following in 1839.

He had also helped found the Grosvenor Street Baptist Chapel in 1836 (when the Neild and Hoyle families had resigned from the Society of Friends due to a secession) and also sat on numerous committees concerned with education, banking and health. Amongst these was the Manchester and Salford Savings Bank, of which he was chairman. As well as being a Justice of the Peace he was an active member of the Commissioners of Police in Manchester and a vigorous campaigner for the introduction of modern policing in the city. He and Alfred Binyon were members of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society. The two sons Alfred and Arthur would both become members later on. He remained active on Manchester Corporation right up to his death, displaying great independence. He was regarded, somewhat unwarrantably, by the Manchester radicals, as a conservative, on account of his taking part in opposition to John Bright and Milner Gibson as mayoral candidates in 1857. Having been a pupil of John Dalton he used his influence on the council to revive interest in the idea of creating a public memorial to him and the setting up of a subscription fund for this. A statue was unveiled in Piccadilly in 1855, and in 1966 it was relocated to Chester Street outside the College of Technology which bore his name (now the Science Faculty of the Manchester Metropolitan University).

Meanwhile the children had grown up. Daughter Ellen married in 1849 at Bowdon Church when she was 22 years old. She did not move far, however, as her husband John Carlisle, 13 years older, was an East India merchant and lived at Fir Bank, adjacent to High Lawn on the north side of East Downs Road (later known as Taveta or most recently as Vine House or Number 29). Up to 1870 John and Ellen went on to have 6 sons and 7 daughters.

Two years earlier in 1847 her elder brother Alfred had been married. He had studied Chemistry at University College London and returned to join the family business. He moved back to Bowdon in 1854 and lived at another adjacent property – Dingle Bank East on the south side of East Downs Road (now known just as Dingle Bank) and opposite his sister. Maps from 1876 (*see earlier*) show that there was a footbridge linking its

garden with that of High Lawn, spanning the narrow lane that separated them. There were no children of the marriage and his wife died in 1857. Two years later he remarried and went on to have three sons and two daughters. For a time he was a director of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce and, like his father, he became a magistrate in due course. He had a keen interest in education and read widely in Mathematics, Classics and Theology. He was a trustee and later chairman of the council of Owens College, and served it and also the Victoria University of Manchester in various capacities up to his death. The younger surviving Neild son Arthur became a clergyman. He married in 1853 and had two sons and a daughter, living at Dingle Bank West, the house adjoining his brother's (nowadays known as Highgate).

For the next six years or so Mr & Mrs Neild appear to have been living alone, apart from their servants, at High Lawn, although all three children were obviously close at hand. After they had grown up the governess Miss Thistlethwaite had stayed on to act as a companion to Mary. Messrs Neild and Binyon were trustees of Penketh School, of which the superintendent for 12 years had been a Mr William Thistlethwaite, and they are likely to have been related. In 1859 Mrs Neild died aged 71. In the following year Bowdon Parish Church was rebuilt, and under the east window, which depicts the crucifixion, there is an inscription "In memory of Mary, the wife of William Neild, Esquire at High Lawn, who died 16<sup>th</sup> March 1859."

Two and a half years later Mr Neild went on to marry Miss Thistlethwaite. The marriage lasted for less than three years and was brought to an end by his sudden death on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April 1864 aged 75. He rose as usual at 6am, made his usual inspection of the stables and outbuildings, then caught the 8.30 express train to Manchester. He went to the printing works on London Road, held a meeting about the Baths & Laundries Company, then went to attend to business at one of his other offices. At about 11am he went to the Town Hall in King Street to attend a meeting of the committee which was planning the new Town Hall. There he collapsed and was shortly pronounced dead. An inquest jury was summoned and held their deliberations in the Mayor's parlour at 1pm. Having viewed the body where it lay and heard the surgeon's opinion that a blood vessel had burst either near the heart or at the back of the brain, the jury returned its verdict and the coroner then released the body, which was carried home to Bowdon, one of the nephews having been sent ahead to warn Mrs Neild.



He was buried in Bowdon Churchyard the following Saturday, with The Manchester Guardian reporting that thousands turned out for the funeral and that about 150 coaches lined Langham Road on the day. Elizabeth looks to have survived him by a couple of years, as it was not until 1866 that the trustees under his will sold High Lawn. He was regarded as the “Father of the Corporation” and on his death a memorial was signed by members of the council that his son Alfred should, if agreeable to himself, be elected an alderman of the council in the room of his father.

There is a full-length life-size portrait of William Neild in Manchester Town Hall on Albert Square (*see back cover*), and a minor road in Manchester named Neild Street on the site of the factory (off Fairfield Street at its crossroads with Travis Street, with a Hoyle Street further along linking Fairfield Street to the Mancunian Way). There is a further reminder of him in Bowdon, where, across from the bottom of his front garden on Langham Road, the thoroughfare which descends very steeply to South Downs Road is known as Nields Brow. Furthermore around 2001 a large development of apartments was built on the right-hand of this road and was given the name of Nields Croft. There can be little doubt that the choice of name was in remembrance of the first owner of High Lawn and the difference in spelling can be put down to a clerical error somewhere along the line.

Later in 1874 Thomas Hoyle & Son was turned into a limited company under the managing directorship of Alfred, another director being Joseph Compton junior, and by that time a bleach works at Sandy Vale in Dukinfield had been added to the Mayfield works and the workforce numbered around 500. It continued in the hands of the next generation of the daughters' families and finally went into liquidation in 1897, having traded for 115 years. The Mayfield print works were demolished early in the next century and replaced with the new Mayfield train station, which opened in 1910 as a relief station to alleviate overcrowding at Piccadilly. It has been closed to passengers since 1960 and at the moment there are plans to regenerate the area over the next 10 years at a cost of £1.1 billion, the centrepiece of the development being a 6.5 acre communal park on the banks of the Medlock, which will be the city's first new green space in over a century.

Although the Neild surname might have disappeared from High Lawn in 1866, the family presence was to continue a lot longer, as the purchaser was John Carlisle from next door. Thus 23 years after she first moved there, Ellen returned the short distance home as the lady of the house. If anything one would have expected that Alfred as elder son would have moved across the road and taken over the largest house, but his own family was much smaller, having three children under the age of five. Although by 1871 the Carlisles had lost four out of their six sons and one of their seven daughters, this still left eight surviving children who were growing up, and maybe it was decided that their need to up-size was the greater. Around this time a restrictive covenant was placed preventing buyers of Dingle Bank from building on the land at the rear and side of the property, presumably to safeguard the views from High Lawn.

Other than that he was an East India merchant I have not been able to find any further details of John Carlisle's business or from where it was conducted. I believe he was a Justice of the Peace and was involved in the business and social life of Manchester. He died in 1882 at the age of 69. Ellen survived him by seven years and died early in 1889, aged 62. The younger children were still unmarried and living at home, and appear to have stayed on after her death. In January 1896, at exactly the time that the youngest daughter Catherine was married, the house was sold for £6,500 and the Neild/Carlisle era came to an end after some 55 years.

The new owner was another JP, George Chester Haworth, age about 52, previously of Didsbury, whose family fortune had also been made in the textile industry, particularly in cotton spinning and manufacturing. In the early 1830s Richard Haworth, the youngest of eight children of a poor artisan, had gone to work at the age of 12 learning to weave fustians at a mill in Bury, having had an elementary education. One day his hand got caught and badly injured in some machinery. When it had healed he secured employment as a weft lad in the same mill, which gave him more spare hours, and he utilised them in attending a night school to make up the deficiencies in his education. It became apparent that he had great aptitude for figures and finance, and rose to more important positions in mills in Bury and Bolton before going to work at a Manchester firm as a bookkeeper. Meanwhile he had been doing ever-increasing business on his own account and after several more years in 1854 decided to start his own business, styled Richard Haworth & Co. in Cannon Street in Manchester.

It expanded rapidly, and by 1861 he was employing 700 hands, rising to 2,700 by 1871, and eventually over 3,000. He had four mills (named Egerton, Tatton, Ordeal and Throstle Nest) in Salford between Ordsall Lane and the Manchester Ship Canal, being among the largest cotton mills in Europe and having 139,000 spindles. At their peak the factories were producing 39 million yards of cloth each year, which is over 17,000 miles, or slightly further than flying from Manchester to New Zealand and back. Richard Haworth died in 1883, aged 63, leaving four sons and two daughters. One son was a Wesleyan minister and George Chester Haworth was the eldest of the remaining three who were then the active partners in the business, and was to become the chairman. In 1901 High Lawn was occupied by George Haworth, his wife Elizabeth, four sons and one daughter (ages from 16 to 30), a cook, a waitress, two housemaids, a kitchen maid, an under house maid, a housekeeper, a stud groom and the groom's wife.

### **The Twentieth Century and beyond**

George Haworth's wife Elizabeth died in 1913 and he appears to have re-married and lived until 1932, when he would have been approaching 90. The eldest son Richard Ford Haworth survived him by less than 18 months and died the following year when he would have been 62. George's second wife Ellen outlived them both and died in 1944. In December of 1945 the Haworth family sold High Lawn. Richard had married and had a son Richard Firth Haworth, born around 1915, who was a Commissioned 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in the Royal Armoured Corps of the Territorial Army in the Second World War. He lost control of the family firm, which finally went into liquidation in 1967. In the early 1970s, when Manchester was still a relic of the industrial revolution and its landscape littered with disused factories and mills, I used to travel to school by train from Altrincham (along the lines where the Metrolink now runs), and can remember seeing a building in the Cornbrook area with the name "Richard Haworth & Co." painted in bold letters along the top.

Reputedly High Lawn has been used as a school and a hospital, but I have not been able to establish when this occurred. In the absence of any corroborating evidence of the above, I surmise that some confusion may have crept in between the house and *Haigh Lawn*, the mansion on St Margaret's Road, which during the First World War was lent by its owner as an annexe to Altrincham General Hospital for the treatment of injured



officers from Britain and the Colonies. The failure of the cotton industry, followed by the depression of the 1920s and 1930s, had a disastrous effect on the fortunes of people in Bowdon, and at the outbreak of war many elegant properties were turned into auxiliary hospitals, centres for the billeting of troops or merely for storage. I have heard on good authority that during the last war the belvedere at High Lawn was used as a vantage point, and when aeroplanes belonging to the Luftwaffe were seen approaching, an alert would be sent for the air raid sirens to be sounded in Manchester.

It seems amazing that when the house and land were sold in December 1945 the consideration was a mere £5,075 - a sum less than Mrs Haworth's husband had paid for it almost exactly half a century before in Queen Victoria's reign – but the world was now a very different place, with very few wealthy industrialists looking for a suitable home. It was only 7 months after V.E. Day and five months after the election of the Attlee government, and the demand for a grand mansion which required a large complement of servants to tend it must have been at rock bottom. It was, however, to prove an excellent opportunity for a local building contractor, 39-year-old Albert Allen, who set about converting the mansion into nine small self-contained flats, making ten dwellings including the cottage. The stables buildings at the rear with their tiled walls were used to provide garaging facilities for those flats and the lodge used as accommodation for the caretaker and his family. In 1950 he sold the house on for £11,250 with tenants in place, the annual rents ranging from £80 for the cottage to £275 for the three largest flats. The house now only stood in an area of only 6,790 square yards, as he had hived off most of the land on the north and east and divided it into fifteen building plots. Post-war building restrictions were now lifted and over the next five years or so Mr Allen's company J H Smith (Hale) Ltd built houses on the plots, some to variations of a standard design but mostly to individual ones to the purchasers' specifications. They formed Heald Drive and Heald Close, though two of them had Heald Road as their front border. Many have been altered or extended over the years, but the secluded yet convenient location has helped to ensure that changes of ownership have been infrequent. There has been a marked tendency to follow the precedent set at High Lawn in the 1860s of keeping the house in the family, and up until late 2018 out of the original fifteen dwellings, eight were still owned or occupied by the first or second owners or their children. Albert Allen was a well-known figure in the Altrincham

area. In the early 1960s he went in to build the Altrincham Ice Rink on Devonshire Road, and in the 1970s, at an age when most men would have given up work, he built the Cresta Court Hotel in Church Street, and ran them both as chairman alongside his building company. He never retired and died in 2002, aged 96.

The status quo at the mansion continued for a quarter of a century, but the 1980s were to see a total transformation. Having passed through a succession of private landlords it was bought by Peter Mather, a former insurance salesman who had turned to dabbling in property development. He proposed several schemes involving the demolition of the outbuildings and replacing them with either flats or town houses, which met with strong opposition from nearby residents. Finally he obtained permission for a development of six dwellings which only required partial demolition and comprised new and existing buildings. The accommodation at the cottage was extended, as was the lodge by conversion of the cellars into basement rooms. The stables were converted and extended to form two mews cottages. The main coach house was demolished and partly in this space a split-level studio house was built. This and one of the cottages had vehicular access from Heald Drive. Finally the huge glass canopy over the original coach washing-down area and the wall which supported it were demolished. This enlarged the gap between the main house and the lodge and here a small square-shaped house entitled The Villa was constructed. The development was completed in 1984 and was styled “High Lawn Village.” The mansion had been in state of genteel decay for some time and the brochure had referred to a “Phase Two” involving refurbishment of the nine flats therein, but this did not materialise. As tenants moved out they were not replaced and with little or no maintenance work carried out before long it was in a state of serious disrepair.

Massive changes came about in 1987 when P J Livesey Developments bought the mansion. The entire centre of the house, roof and floors were removed leaving only the external walls in place and a new steel framed inner structure was erected. Excavations at the front made space for three garden apartments with the terrace reinstated above them. The original cellars on a similar level were utilised to create an underground parking area. The two floors of the main body of the house were extended slightly and four more apartments were created here. The original belvedere having been demolished, a new one of similar appearance was built. The

removal of a large number of chimneys provided space for a much larger structure which was erected at a higher position, leaving space for another floor and terraces underneath. These two levels were used to create a showpiece penthouse apartment reckoned to be the highest residential point in Bowdon. Overall there were eight apartments with floor areas ranging from 2100 to 3900 square feet and fitted to the most luxurious of specifications. The communal entrance areas had marbled lofty halls with full height mirrored timber panelling and large crystal chandeliers. Not surprisingly for such an up-market development, they all had hefty price tags and the publicity circulated at the time suggested that the penthouse at over £500,000 was the most expensive apartment outside London.

There is some truth in the argument that these changes have ripped the heart and soul out of the original house and only the basic shell survives. Another point of view might be that towards the end of the twentieth century, just as the city of Manchester had still not got away from its Victorian past and needed to be reinvented, so too High Lawn needed a transformation and new identity, and that both got what was required. The changes have brought a whole new influx of residents who in their own ways could be said to represent the present day and age, just as the early families reveal much about their own. They might make an interesting project for some future amateur local historian!

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