

A House Through Time

Highfield, Sandford Avenue, Church Stretton: 1904 – 1961

The idea to research the history of Highfield arose from watching the attractive old barn, which had once been the coach-house to the main house, being demolished. The back of Highfield and the barn formed the main view from the back of our house.



It was a beautiful sight when the sun hit the house (whatever the season, it always seemed to us to be at 6 pm) and the colour of the red bricks mellowed, as they glowed in its rays. The barn was replaced by a modern house.



The contrast between the old and the new made us wonder about the other changes that Highfield must have seen since it was built and what sort of people had lived there over the years.

We are indebted to the current owners of Highfield for their help in compiling this account. We continue to admire the house - from the back, at 6 o'clock!

A House Through Time: Highfield, Sandford Avenue

1904 - 1961



Highfield is an attractive Edwardian house on the eastern section of Sandford Avenue, in Church Stretton.

It has undergone adaptations and improvements over its 115 year-plus history but the description given when it was last sold serves to illustrate its size and grandeur:

ERECTED in 1907, it has all the quality and charm of a bygone era, constructed as it is of first class materials of a quality now unobtainable. Approach from the Avenue is by an excellent asphalted driveway which sweeps past the entrance in a semi circle with vehicular exit to rejoin the Avenue again lower down. GROUND FLOOR: hall, lounge, dining room, breakfast room, conservatory, sewing room, kitchen, scullery, rear lobby, rear entrance porch, bathroom, linen room 1ST FLOOR: 4 bedrooms, bathroom, linen room 2ND FLOOR 3 further bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom OUTSIDE: covered in rear yard giving access to workshop and W.C., garage, compost bins, gardens which have been superbly laid out, spacious lawns, flower beds, mature trees, shrubbery, orchard.

The First Owners: Henry and Mary Dawson Salt

The first occupants were Henry and Mary Dawson Salt – whose surname is well recognised in the town as a result of the shop in the High Street that still bears their name.

The land on which the house was built was bought from Ralph Beaumont Benson of Lutwyche Hall, who – in common with other landowners (both individual and newly-formed companies) - started to sell off parcels of his local estate for development at the turn of the last century. This was at a time when Church Stretton was experiencing a spate of development and consequently a sizeable increase in its population. This particular plot was sold to Mary Salt (née Proffit) in 1904. A second, adjacent parcel was sold to her the following year.

It had only been just over 20 years earlier that the law had been changed to allow married women to own property in their own right¹.

Henry Salt was the son of the innkeeper of the Royal Oak in Cardington and was baptised in June 1855. By 1861 he was living with his parents, six siblings and a servant at the Royal Oak. A servant may sound grand to the modern ear but at the time it was quite usual for larger families to employ a servant girl – often either an unmarried female relative or a young girl who was rewarded with little more than board and lodgings.

By 1871, at the age of 15, Henry was apprenticed to Henry Wood, an ironmonger, of High Street in Church Stretton, who had his shop in one half of what we now know as Salt's (the other half was occupied by the Shrewsbury Old Bank)²



Henry Wood's Ironmonger's Shop on the right and the Shrewsbury Old Bank on the left.

Attribution: Sketch from David Bilbey's book "Church Stretton"

On the face of it, things seem to be going well for Henry Wood. However, the following notice had appeared in the Shrewsbury Chronicle in 1869:

**THE BANKRUPTCY ACT, 1861, AND
THE BANKRUPTCY AMENDMENT ACT, 1868.—**
Re **HENRY WOOD'S** Assignment.—Notice is hereby given,
that the Trustee under a Deed of Assignment, dated the Tenth
day of April, 1869, and duly registered in pursuant of the
provisions of the above Acts, on the 8th day of May, 1869, made
by **HENRY WOOD**, of **Church Stretton**, in the County of Salop,
Ironmonger, is about to declare a Dividend, and that all
Creditors or other persons (excepting those who have already
proved their debts) having Claims upon the Estate of the said
Henry Wood, are required to send full particulars thereof to the
undersigned, on or before the Thirteenth day of August next,
otherwise they will be excluded from the benefit of the said
Dividend. Dated the 29th day of July, 1869.
S. HARLEY KOUGH,
Shrewsbury and Church **Stretton**,
Solicitor for the Trustee.

A Deed of Assignment is used to assign just the beneficial interest in land or property (eg rents) from one party to another – as opposed to a Deed of Trust, which includes other provisions such as how to dispose of a property. Things

Valuable COPYHOLD MESSUAGES, IRONMONGER'S
SHOP, WAREHOUSES, STABLES, and other premises,
situate, at CHURCH STRETTON, in the county of Salop.
TO BE SOLD BY AUCTION
(By Order of the Mortgagees), by
MESSRS. H. A. JONES AND SON, at
the Hotel, **Church Stretton**, Salop, on **THURSDAY**, the
9th day of March, 1871, at Three for Four o'clock in the after-
noon, in one or more lots as may be agreed upon by the Vendors
at the time of Sale, and subject to such conditions as shall then
be produced.
All those Two Copyhold Messuages, DWELLING-HOUSES,
or TENEMENTS, with the Warehouses, Stables, and other
Appurtenances thereto belonging, and occupied therewith,
situate and being opposite the Market Hall, in the town of
Church Stretton, and now in the respective occupations of Mr.
Henry Wood and Mr. Richard Home.
And also all that Copyhold COTTAGE or TENEMENT, with
the Garden and other Appurtenances thereto belonging), and
adjoining the above-mentioned Messuages, or one of them, and
now in the occupation of Mr. John Lloyd.
The above-mentioned premises are Copyhold of Inheritance
of the Manor of Stretton-in-le-Dale, and offer a good opportu-
nity for the Investment of Capital. The Buildings are in
good repair and condition.
Plans and particulars, and any further information, may
be obtained on application to Messrs. JERVIS and GOULD,
Uttoxeter, Solicitors for the Vendors; or the AUCTIONEERS, Milk
Street, Shrewsbury.

don't seem to have improved as not long after this, in March 1871, this sale, by order of the mortgagees, i.e. the lenders, was announced in the Shrewsbury Chronicle.

We don't know whether Henry Woods was the owner and the earlier assignment notice related to another

property or whether he was just one of the occupiers of the premises up for sale. Either way, it seems that his fortunes were not as robust as the 1871 census suggests³. To add further to his woes, his wife, Mary Ann, died in the second quarter of 1880, followed shortly by his sister, with whom he had been very close. The latter had met with a tragic accident when she had climbed to the summit of the Little Orme in Llandudno during a storm and had been “precipitated to the bottom by a gust of wind”⁴.

To return to Henry Salt: given his later commercial success it would be interesting to track his progression from apprentice, through to owner, of Salt’s buildings. We’re frustrated in this by the fact that he doesn’t appear anywhere in the 1881 census. This could simply be because he was travelling somewhere at the time: it doesn’t imply that he had moved away from the area. In fact, we know from an article in the Wellington Journal that he was still in the same building and in fact he now had the ironmonger’s shop⁵. What we don’t know is when he bought the “copyhold messuages, ironmonger’s shop, warehouses, stables and other premises” described in the for-sale notice of 1871 – surely he couldn’t have bought them at auction when he was only 15.

Henry married Mary Dawson Proffit in 1886. She’d been born in Church Stretton in 1860 to Thomas, a draper and Mary, a confectioner, who had a shop at No 5, Market Square (today’s Thai restaurant): the tiled entrance to what was their business still bears their name.



Mary was noted as helping in Proffit's shop with her parents and elder sister in the 1881 census. This would have been just across the High Street from Henry's shop.

Henry and Mary's son, Frederick Henry, was born the year after they married, in September, 1887 and their daughter, Edith Mary, followed in 1890.

Henry seems to have been doing well⁶.

In 1891 the family were living with a 19-year-old servant girl and Mary's mother, Ann Proffit, who was by then a widow listed as living off her own means. They were in what we now know as the Salt's building in High Street.

Sadly, their daughter Edith died in 1893, aged just three years. Henry and Mary were to have no further children.



In 1901 Henry redesigned the shop front (see photo on the left), as the Shrewsbury Old Bank was no longer operating from the other half of the ground floor.

By this time Henry and Mary had moved into No 1 Ashlett House at 50, High Street⁷, which Henry had built. Ashlett House is, in fact, two substantial houses, opposite what is now Tony's hairdressing salon. Ashlett House No 2 (52, High Street) was rented out to a retired cloth agent and three of his four spinster sisters, along with an 18 year-old cook/domestic. Mary Salt was taking advantage of the developing need for

boarding and lodging houses of all kinds within the town, as this excerpt from the Victoria History shows:

"Boarding houses apparently began to trade in the 1890s, though Mrs. H. Salt's Ashlett House in High Street appears to have been the only purpose-built one;

others, like the Central Boarding House and Family Hotel on the opposite side of High Street, were adapted buildings. Not for about a decade did directories begin to list boarding houses: there were six in 1905 and nine (out of thirteen in the county) in 1909. By 1909 apartments were being let by 45 householders (mainly in the town), the same number as Shrewsbury, a town twelve times more populous than the three Strettons. Numbers listed remained at that level until the First World War but apparently declined then.”



Henry Salt’s initials can still be seen above the doorways to Ashlett House

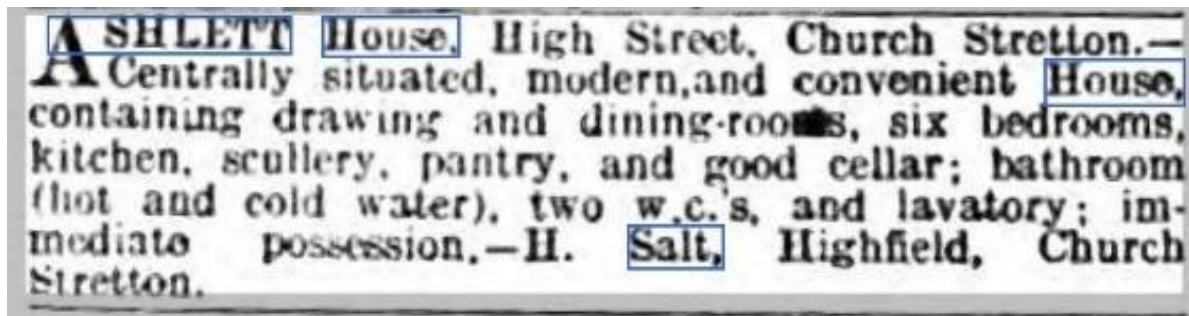
The couple were continuing to prosper⁸ and were well connected with the rest of the local business community. That same year (1901) there was a sale in the Buck’s Head yard of furniture (and a double-barrelled breech-loading gun!) from the Salts, due to extensive alterations to their premises.



By 1907 Highfield was finished – more than that, it is *very well* built and the first owner’s pride is still evident, even in something as mundane as a downspout.

This wasn’t something to be tolerated as an ugly necessity or hidden away: it was turned into a decorative feature in itself: an ironmonger had had this house built!

The following advert appeared in the "To Let" section of the Wellington Journal in October 1907:



ASHLETT House, High Street, Church Stretton.—
A Centrally situated, modern, and convenient **House,** containing drawing and dining-rooms, six bedrooms, kitchen, scullery, pantry, and good cellar; bathroom (hot and cold water), two w.c.s, and lavatory; immediate possession.—H. **Salt,** Highfield, Church Stretton.

In 1911, Henry and Mary were living in Highfield with their son Frederick, an ironmonger; two boarders working as ironmongers and two female house servants. Ashlett House 1, in which they had been living, was now occupied by a bank manager and his widowed mother, along with two servants and Ashlett House 2, next door, was occupied by the Rev Bryant who ran a small boarding school from there. This was certainly a couple who had made the most of the opportunities arising from Church Stretton's Edwardian expansion⁹.

Henry died in 1917, aged 62, leaving £4,630 8s 11d to Mary. When Mary died in 1931, some 15 years later, aged 71, she left the impressive sum of £20,767 7s 7d to Frederick.

In 1934 Kelly's Directory lists Frederick Salt at Highfield. He died in 1937, single, aged just 49. He had clearly not squandered the inheritance from his parents, as he left £22,706 2s 6d to Mary Jane Jackson, widow and Thomas Proffit, draper. Two years later Thomas Proffit, who was Frederick's uncle, was in All Stretton Hall, which was then a hotel owned by his wife and with a sizeable clientele.

Second Owner: Florence Rouse Boughton-Knight

On 19th July, 1938 the representatives of Frederick Salt's estate sold the property to Florence Rouse Boughton-Knight, a 71 year-old spinster. This is a plan of the very sizeable plot of Highfield at that time:



Tracing Florence back to the beginning: she was baptised in August 1867, at Downton in Herefordshire. Her entry in Burke's Peerage reads:

Florence Rouse-Boughton-Knight¹

F, #175357, d. 18 March 1956

Last Edited=27 Nov 2005

Florence **Rouse-Boughton-Knight** was the daughter of **Andrew Johnes Rouse-Boughton-Knight** and **Eliza Severne**.¹ She died on 18 March 1956, unmarried.¹

1. [S63] Peter Townend, editor, *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, 103rd edition (London, U.K.: Burke's Peerage Ltd, 1963), page 291.

She lived at Downton Castle, a Grade I listed building five miles west of Ludlow.

Florence's early life can be understood from the 1871 census which shows her as a four year-old at Downton Castle along with her parents, 6 siblings, a 13 year-old visitor (a scholar, presumably a relative), a governess, housekeeper, head nurse, 2 under nurses, 3 housemaids, 2 laundry maids, a kitchen maid, scullery maid, butler and 2 footmen. Over the stables lived a stud groom, his wife, 3 children and a coachman. Elsewhere on the estate, in Stonebrook

House, were an estate agent and farmer with his wife, 5 children and 3 servants. In the Garden House were the gardener and his wife. Elsewhere were a carpenter and his family, a farm bailiff, another groom and his family along with a plethora of agricultural labourers.



Downton Castle
c 1890

The 1881 census showed much the same picture².

In 1901 Florence was by then 32 and she and an elder sister were the only siblings still at home. There were other visitors of the same age and also some grandchildren there at the time of the census, so it seems to have been quite a lively household. The numbers of servants and estate staff were still broadly similar to those in previous decades. Judging by a report of the Shrewsbury Hunt Ball in November 1903 which showed all the great and the good of the County in attendance, including Florence, her social life was as one would imagine it to have been.

Florence's father died on 7th June 1909, leaving the princely sum at the time of £240,581 1s 9d. In his original will, he had left Florence £11,000 and a house – St Mary's Knoll House – and contents, along with c 105 acres. However, a codicil to the will revoked or reduced this because, he stated, "My investments are not in such a prosperous state as at the date of my will, and in view of largely increased taxation on landed estates I am compelled to reduce the fortune of each of my daughters and to revoke other legacies". The extent to which this affected Florence is unknown. Although she was living in Mary Knoll

House in 1911, along with her mother, a butler, lady's maid, housemaid, scullery maid, parlour maid and kitchen maid, her mother was listed as the head of the house. Her mother died in 1914 leaving a mere £3,638 7s 1d. Florence remained on the register of electors until 1931 as occupant of Mary Knoll House, although this is sometimes described as Mary Knoll Cottage so perhaps she has at some point downsized to a smaller house on the estate.

Mary Knoll House as
it is now



The next we hear of Florence is on 11th November, 1933, when she boarded *The Orama*, a ship leaving London destined for Australia. Her own destination port was Naples. Curiously, her last address in England is given as c/o Mr Wilkins, The Schools, Ludlow.

No further record of her has been found until her purchase of Highfield five years later, in July 1938, at the age of 71.

This clearly didn't turn out as expected, as revealed by correspondence with her solicitors in 1939, which shows that almost immediately she wanted to sell the property. She was asking for £2,500 but would have accepted £2,300. The general rates were £30 7s 4d pa and water rates £5 4s 10d. There had been a potential buyer but the sale didn't go through when the interested party realised that the property was much larger than she'd imagined. In giving her reasons for selling, Florence explained that her eyesight was failing and she had a weak heart. She felt that the house was too big for her to manage on her own. It was in need of repair and modernisation by that point – perhaps Frederick, being a bachelor, had not quite the incentive for keeping the house in good order as he might have had, had he had a family of his own.

World events soon overtook the fate of both Florence and her new home when World War II was declared on 3rd September 1939. In line with other properties in Church Stretton, Highfield was requisitioned by the army.

As for Downton Castle, during the Second World War, pupils from Lancing College, a boarding school on the South Coast, were evacuated to Downton Castle as the school was taken over as a naval training facility, HMS King Alfred.

By 29th September 1939 Florence was living in a small hotel in Plas Newydd, Llandrindod Wells. It was run by the three Misses Davies, all single and sisters – the daughters of a clergyman. Running this sort of establishment was not at all unusual for women: it was one of the few respectable means of earning a living open to those women who had some resources and wished for independence. Other than the Davies sisters, a housemaid/waitress and a general maid, there were three other ladies and two men living there. The ladies were all of private means; one of the men was a retired company secretary and the other a retired bank manager. Not quite the elevated company that Florence had been used to but it was wartime, she was in the country away from the dangerous towns and cities, had not to fend for herself and presumably had the company of others should she wish for it.



No records relating to Florence were found for the period after 1939 until her sale of Highfield in 1948 and then her death in 1956, aged 86. She died at Cheadle Royal Hospital, a private mental health hospital in Cheshire. Given her age, perhaps she was suffering from dementia. She left £22,038 9s 11d.

Interestingly, an entry in the London Gazette in 1956 relating to her will gives her last known address as Glenavon; 14, Watling Street South (left, as it is now).

A rather stark contrast to Downton Castle, where her life had begun.

Third Occupiers: The Army
The 50 Anti-tank Training Regiment 1939-43
(Regiment and dates from: <https://nigelef.tripod.com/recruittrain.htm>)

When Highfield was requisitioned, the house itself was used to accommodate officers, with barracks built in the grounds for the other ranks. The 50 Anti-Tank Training Regiment, Royal Artillery, carried out training on the Long Mynd and surrounding areas and used Highfield as a base from 1939 to 1943. The foundations of the barracks are still to be found in the garden of the house next to Highfield, to the west, which was built at a later date, when parcels of the land were divided and sold separately.

Lettering on the doors of Highfield from this period, under layers of paint, can still be seen when a strong light hits them at the right angle. These read:

Ground Floor East:	O i/c Admin
Ground Floor West:	O.C. Wing
G F Hall West:	Knock (?) CSM and CQMS Please Close Door
First Floor Rear West:	Corporal
First Floor Front East:	Sergeants
First Floor Front West:	Officers' Room
Second Floor Rear West:	Sergeants' Quarters
Second Floor Front West:	Sergeants' Quarters

WW2 People's War is an online archive of wartime memories contributed by members of the public and gathered by the BBC. The archive can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar . This extract by Jack Partridge almost certainly describes Highfield:

"I was called up on 22nd January 1942. I was one of the first group of eighteen year-olds to be called up. Previously to that only over twenty year-olds had

received their papers and it had always been said they (the government) wouldn't call up the eighteens; however this was after Dunkirk and things were pretty desperate.

I had to go on the train from my home town, Halesowen to Birmingham to pick up a connection to Church Stretton via Shrewsbury. We left Birmingham just after 9.00am and we didn't get to Church Stretton until 6.00pm because there was heavy snow. The train stopped at several stations on the way and everyone that got on the train was eighteen.

By evening the snow was four feet deep and we were hungry having had no food provided all day. The army marched us to a cookhouse in the middle of the village, an old flour mill I believe. We were fed and then taken about half a mile away to the barracks where we were split into groups of 30. All we could see in the dark was a large house and some Nissan huts.

The next morning we were marched back into the village for breakfast then back again to the barracks where we were issued with our kit. We had to wrap our civvy clothes in brown paper and label them. I addressed mine to my mother, Jenny Partridge, a widow, back in Halesowen little thinking how she might feel when she received the parcel.

At this stage for us the war was a new adventure and we spent the next month getting fit. In PT we'd stand in rows of twelve opposite each other and toss a log (the trunk of a tree) from one row to another. If you were tall in between to shorter lads you took the full weight of the log when catching so we used to try to sort ourselves out in height order. Then we went to All Stretton to get used to Two Pounder guns and working in gun teams. The sergeant's favourite training was to get each crew to run with the guns up and down the slopes of the Long Mynd.

After three months training we were split up into our units. I was sent to a newly formed unit with around forty others from the training camp. The 81st Anti-Tank Regiment based in Cromer. All of our sergeants in the unit were ex-Dunkirk veterans who no doubt saw us as a load of very raw recruits."

For a long time after the war, the young boys of the area had a lot of fun searching for (hopefully) spent cartridges on the Mynd.

Fourth Owner: Kate Summersgill Marshall

Once Highfield was derequisitioned, it was sold to Miss Kate Summersgill Marshall in 1948.

Kate had been born into a Methodist family, in 1895, in Shipley, Yorkshire. Her unusual middle name was her mother's maiden name. In the 1901 census Kate, aged 5, was living with her widowed mother Elizabeth, who was a dressmaker. By 1911, however, Kate, aged 16, was a telephone operator for a stuff merchant (ie a merchant who deals in any kind of manufactured material).

The next move was to be significant for her future peripatetic career path: in August 1912, aged 17, she became a Learner with the Postal Service in Shipley and later that month she was transferred to Bradford: an entry in the London Gazette in November that year records Kate as having been issued with a certificate as a Female Learner After Open Competition.

In December 1914 she was promoted to SC&T - a Sorting Clerk and Telegraphist - in Bradford but on 3rd July 1917 she was in London when she



WWI telegraphists in Boulogne

enlisted for the army, joining the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) which had only been established in February that year. It intended to free up men from administrative tasks for service at the front and was divided into four sections including cookery, mechanical and clerical. Although recruitment began in March 1917, it was only formally instituted on 7th July. (The WAAC was known as Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps – QMAAC - from 9 April 1918.) The Corps did not have the same status as men; instead of ranks it had grades – officers were called 'Officials' and Non-Commissioned Officers were called 'Forewomen' and other ranks 'Workers'. Although not recognised as military ranks, some of the conditions were clearly in line with military rather than civilian work, including the power of a "Court of summary jurisdiction" to be sentenced to imprisonment with or without hard labour for a term not exceeding six months should she absent herself without lawful excuse from any work it was her duty to perform. She agreed to "serve for a period of twelve months from 25th June, 1917 or for the duration of the war, whichever is the greater period" and was sent to Le Havre three days after the WAAC was formally instituted.

Her initial grade was "worker" but in June 1918 she was promoted to "Assistant Forewoman": upon discharge, she earned 42/- per week gross (£2 10p – equivalent to about £9,500 at today's rates), 28/- (a modern day equivalent would be about £6,400) after deduction of 14/- board and keep.

During her service abroad, Kate was hospitalised with influenza twice, once on 21st February, 1919 - was this the Spanish Flu? There was certainly an awful lot of other patients admitted with the influenza at that time, according to the hospital records. She was also once hospitalised with "debility" which must have been quite severe as she was evacuated back to the UK. Not all was bad news, however: she was granted a few days leave in Paris in May, 1919.

The following month, Kate applied for discharge on compassionate grounds, stating that she was an only child and her widowed mother, who was partially dependent on her, had not been in good health for some considerable time and wished for her to return home at the earliest possible moment. Her mother had been living entirely alone and felt that the strain of the last two years was affecting her health. Kate went on to explain that she had joined up with her mother's full consent as one of her (Kate's) married cousins could visit her frequently. However, the cousin's husband had just been demobilised and Kate felt that under those circumstances, it was her duty to be with her mother. Her application was approved by the Officer i/c Signals in the

Montreuil area, which was the British Army GHQ on the Western Front from March 1916 until early 1919, on the basis that he would probably be able to release her without relief once “the Pourville staff arrive”. (Pourville is on the coast just over half way between Montreuil and Le Havre.)

It is worth noting that during WWI, 81 women of the QMAAC were killed, and five were awarded the Military Medal for their services. A posting to France, even in a clerical role, was not without its dangers and we should not underestimate their contribution to the war effort.

Back in civilian life in the Post Office, Kate was transferred to Cardiff in 1924, again as a SC&T –and two years later she was transferred yet again – this time to Eastbourne. There is no record of her mother during this time but it would seem unlikely that she was travelling around with her daughter, as she died in Yorkshire, in 1932.

The next record we have of Kate herself is from the 1939 Register (taken shortly after the outbreak of war in the UK and used to produce identity cards and, later, ration books) which shows Kate living on her own at 49, Ellesmere Road in Shrewsbury. Her occupation is given as “Cooperative Club Collector”. She was then 44 years old. It does seem odd that she should leave such a secure job as that in the Post Office. Did she do so to look after her mother after her health deteriorated even further, perhaps?

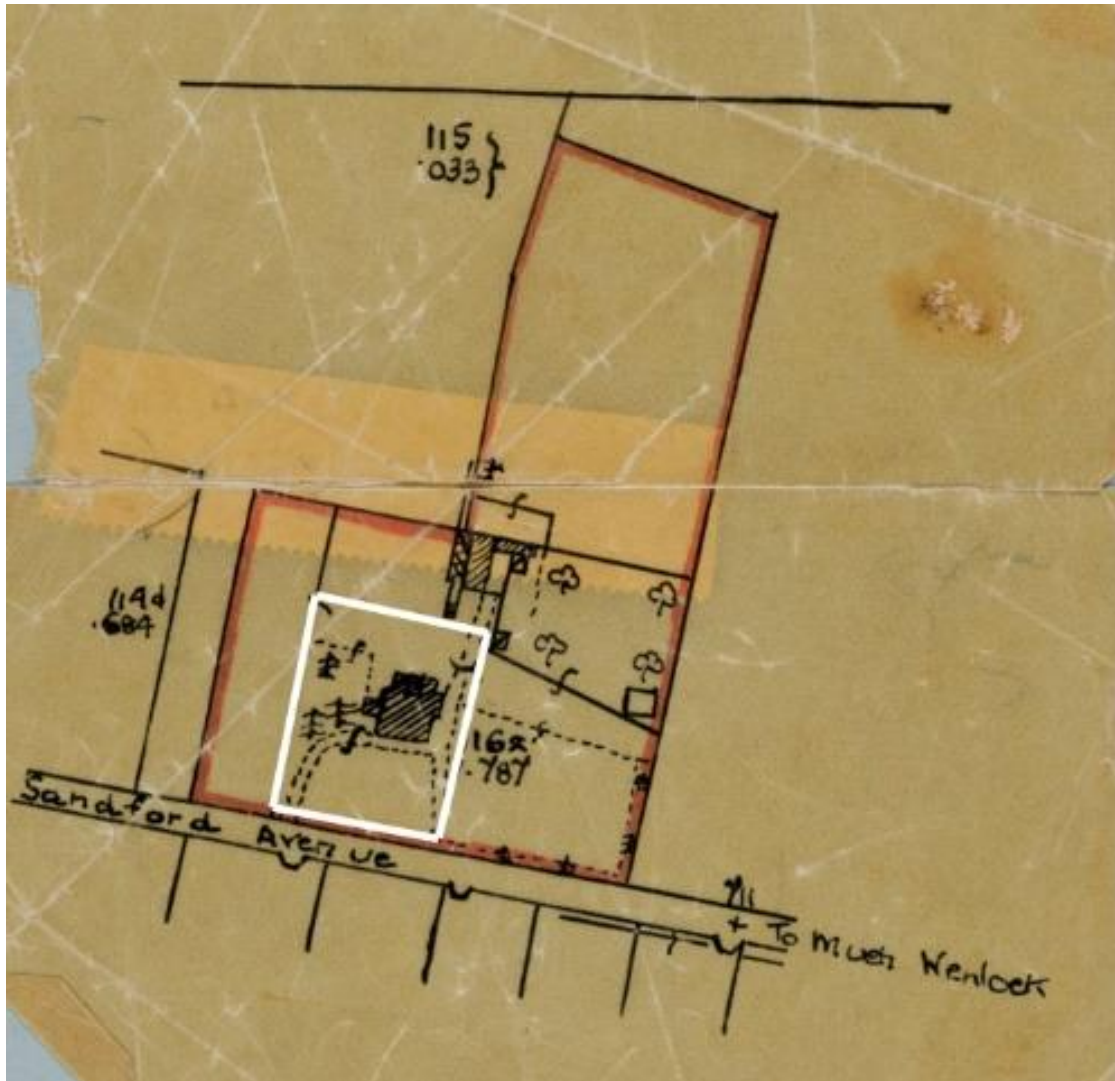
Her connection with Highfield starts when she bought the property from Florence Boughton-Knight in June 1948, with the aid of a private mortgage from a Mrs Eliza Jane Cooper who later transferred it to her sister-in-law Miss Mary Little “and others” in 1951 (perhaps as an early inheritance, as Mrs Cooper died in 1954).

Kate stayed there for thirteen years, cleverly selling off parcels of land separately from the house and gardens: a trend that continues apace today with regard to the town’s Edwardian villas. Highfield had originally had five acres of land: the coach house and field were sold to Denis Williams, who also owned Helmeth Woods; land to the west was sold to Mr Poole, Denis Williams’s cousin, who built a bungalow on it (now No 99, Sandford Avenue) and the land to the east, which consists of two blocks, was also sold to Mr Williams, who was allowed to build one house on it. When Denis Williams died, his estate was auctioned: the Woodland Trust bought Helmeth Woods and Roger Hill, the local property developer, bought the coach house and its field.

Kate Summersgill Marshall sold Highfield in January 1961 and the next record we have of her is in the Phone Book for 1969, where her address is given as 1, Hillcroft, Cunnery Road. By 1976 her address in the phone book is Yearlett in Cunnery Road. She died on 5th April 1982, aged 86, in Weston House, Green End, Whitchurch, Shropshire. Probate on her estate of £62,778 was granted on 31st August 1982 in Brighton.

Later owners

Kate Marshall sold a much scaled down Highfield (see diagram below) to a Goss and Sharp who only kept it for two years, until December 1963, when it was sold to a local Church Stretton family. The present owners bought the house in 1976.



There was such a lot of change over the first 60 years since Highfield was built by the Salt family: a home for a successful Edwardian business couple, designed to accommodate not only the family but also their servants, who lived through the ravages of the First World War. A period of some little neglect when inherited by their son. The next owner a 71 year old spinster with an entry in Burke's Peerage. Requisitioned by the War Office in WWII. Bought by a woman born at the end of the C19th whose father died just a few months after her birth, whose widowed mother was a dressmaker but who herself lived an independent life, served in WWI in France and who had

enough acumen to buy Highfield and become an early practitioner of the art of selling off the land attached to Edwardian villas for development.

The economic activity of women, which is so often hidden from view, is surprisingly evident throughout this narrative. It was a great surprise to us to find that throughout the period studied, all the owners of the property were women, apart from Frederick Salt - who inherited it from his mother.

Mary Dawson had her own trade before marrying Henry Salt, as had her own mother. Florence had sat out the war in a boarding house run by three sisters. Frederick left half of his estate to his uncle, whose wife managed her husband's shop as well as being the proprietor of her own large hotel.

The opportunity for economic advancement during the first half of the C20th, coupled with the downward trajectory of some of the wealthier classes due to death duties, was also highlighted. After accounting for inflation, Mary Dawson Salt left more in her will than did Florence Rouse Boughton-Knight.

Given the number of boarding houses we see in the census data from this period, coupled with the number of relatively modest households that had at least one servant and the homes having members of their extended family living with them, it is no wonder that - looked at from that perspective – there is a housing shortage today.

Further Information

The First Owners: Henry and Mary Salt

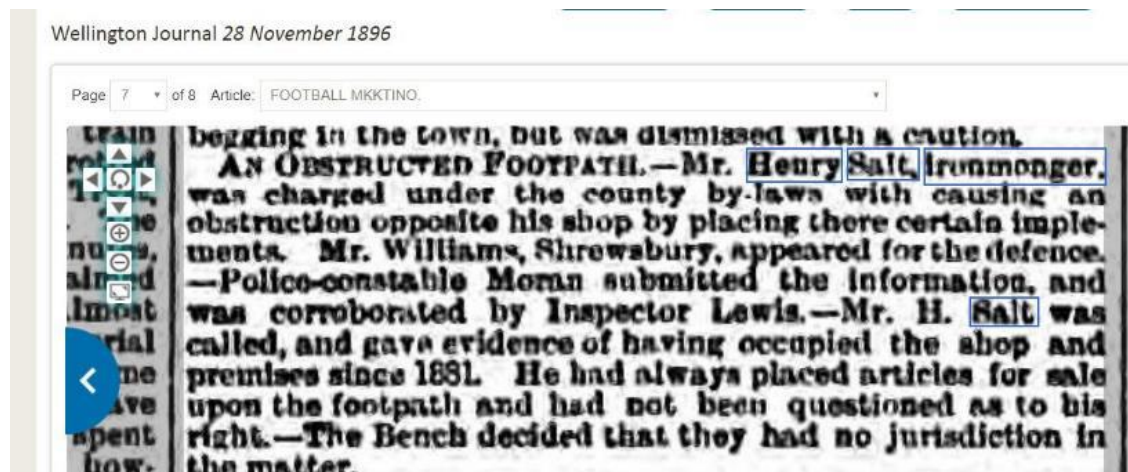
¹ Prior to this, upon marriage, any property that a woman owned was surrendered to her husband upon marriage. This didn't just relate to tangible assets: for instance, any copyright that a woman writer owned was also surrendered to her husband.

² Also in the household were Henry Wood's wife, Mary (née Millichope); their 14 year-old daughter Clara, who was still at school; a 21 year-old nephew who was a coal agent; Caroline Millichope, their 20 year-old housekeeper and a 26 year-old general servant.

³ By 1881, although still in the same premises, he was living with just his daughter and a 15 year-old servant girl.

BISHOP'S CASTLE.

A SHROPSHIRE LADY ACCIDENTALLY KILLED AT LLANDUDNO.—On Wednesday morning last, great commotion was caused at Llandudno by a report that a lady visitor had met with a fatal accident by falling down a precipice on the Little Ormeshead. The unfortunate visitor—Mrs. Norton, wife of Mr. Robert Norton, ironmonger, Bishops Castle—in company with five others, her husband and family and two friends, arrived in the town about a week prior on a visit. Mrs. Norton, who was a good walker, and rather venturesome, was accustomed to long walks alone, and on Tuesday morning, after breakfast, left her friends for her usual "long walk," intimating she thought of going to the Little Orme and back. Her friends went into the town, returning at one p.m. for dinner. Mrs. Norton not having arrived, they waited till about two o'clock, when becoming very anxious, it was decided to make a search. Being unsuccessful, they called in Sergeant Hughes and Police-constable John Jones, who along with a native, made a thorough search of the Little Orme, but with the same result. At eleven p.m., Police-constable John Jones took a boat and four mariners, and made a complete circuit of the Orme. On the return journey, at three o'clock on Wednesday morning daybreak, they saw an object on the shore which proved to be the body of the deceased. It was half buried in sand and stone, the tide having washed over her. She appeared to have climbed to the summit of the Orme, and to have been precipitated to the bottom by a gust of wind—it being very stormy—a depth of about 500 feet. The body was much bruised and cut. She could not positively have gained the spot where she was found by walking. She was conveyed to her apartments, where an inquest was held on Wednesday, before Mr. J. H. Roberts, coroner for Carnarvon. Evidence was given by Mrs. Knill, Shrewsbury (friend of deceased), Police-constable John Jones, and Noah Edwards, boatman, corroborating the above.—The Jury were of opinion that the deceased had met with her death by falling from off the Little Ormeshead, in the parish of Llandudno. The deceased lady is the only sister of Mr. Henry Wood, ironmonger, Church Stretton. Much sympathy is felt at the latter place for Mr. Wood, who was warmly attached to his sister, and who has recently sustained another sad bereavement in the death of his wife.



⁶ We see from the the Ludlow Advertiser in 1890 that Henry had been awarded a contract by the Church Stretton Gas Company to lay down gas mains to the extent of the urban area at a cost of between £400 and £500. In the same year Henry sued R B Gilmore, gentleman, of Dorrington for work done and goods supplied to the value of £16 13s 7d. The judge found in favour of Henry and awarded him costs on top of the amounts due.

⁷ They were with their son Frederick (by then, 13 years old); Henry's brother Benjamin who was working for him as an ironmonger; Mary's 16-year old niece; a 16-year-old apprentice ironmonger; a 24 year-old carter delivering the business's goods and a 22 year-old domestic servant.

⁸ In 1901 Henry seconded one councillor, John Harman, for re-election to the CS Urban District Council and proposed another, Herbert Robert Southam. Both were re-elected. Interestingly, Harman was a draper and had the shop next door to Mary's elder brother, John E Proffit, who was also a draper at the time.

A further insight into the business is given by a 1902 advert placed by Mrs Salt for a respectable, married man to deliver goods to the country, look after horses and cows and clean boots. In return good wages and a cottage were promised.

In 1903 Henry Salt was awarded a joint contract along with Mr Pryce by the Church Stretton Board of Guardians (charged with administering the Poor Law)

to supply brushes. Incidentally, the drapery contract was jointly awarded to Proffit and Harman.

In February 1905 Mr Salt was again advertising for someone used to horses and cattle and delivering goods to the country – this time they could be married or single. Also that year Henry was awarded a contract by the urban council for providing a supply of water to property in Little Stretton belonging to Mr Beddoes, Mrs Beddoes and the Joint Railway Company.

They say they are specialists in Herald Ranges and Peveril Grates, tile hearts, curbs, wood, slate and marble chimney pieces, enamelled and painted baths etc. They offered free designs for furnishings and free estimates.

In May 1905 the Wellington Journal carried an advert from Salts respectfully inviting the reader to view their showrooms “where every modern house requisite was displayed”⁹.

⁹In 1909 at the Shrewsbury County Court, a charge was brought against a smallholder for damage to the plaintiff’s garden by the defendant’s sheep. The defendant, however, swore that the sheep actually belonged to Mr Henry Salt and the case was deferred so that Mr Salt could be cited as co-defendant. Perhaps the Salts were keeping sheep on their land adjacent to Highfield. They already had a coach house/stable with accommodation above for a groom.

In June 1916, there was a conveyance by way of surrender by Edward George Sandford Corser (a solicitor, previously encountered as a local councillor) of a piece of land called 'Chidley's Patch' in the parish of Cardington to Henry Salt of Church Stretton. The consideration was £17.10s.

The Second Owner: Florence Boughton-Knight

¹ At various times her father held the office of High Sheriff of Herefordshire, Deputy Lieutenant of Herefordshire, Justice of the Peace for Shropshire and Justice of the Peace for Herefordshire. The estate of Downton was acquired by Richard Knight (1659–1749), a wealthy ironmaster from Madeley, Shropshire, and proprietor of the Bringewood Ironworks.

² By 1891 when Florence was 23 the situation was still largely the same as in 1881, the main difference being that there were no longer any nursery staff as the children had now grown. She had two older sisters still at home and a younger brother so didn't lack for company of her own age. Curiously, her father Andrew Johnes was not listed at all in the 1891 census but we do know that he was alive - perhaps he was simply travelling at the time of the census. In 1886 Florence was reported to have attended the Montgomeryshire County Ball. In 1891 Andrew Johnes Rouse-Boughton-Knight was listed as an Army Officer as well as landowner and Deputy Lieutenant (of Herefordshire) for the first time. He was 74: was this an honorary position, perhaps? No record of his military service can be found.