

BROADOAKS, WEST BYFLEET

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I have been trying to understand the history of the ownership of Broadoaks for quite some time. Every so often in directories, guidebooks and other documents I come across the names of former owners or occupiers, but the records only reveal little snippets of information and always leave me wanting to know more.

I have tried to find out some background information on the characters from the internet but I have long since come to the conclusion that trying to find reliable information there is almost impossible (my own site excluded). The whole task now seems like I am trying to view the picture of a 1,000 piece jigsaw when you know you only have half the pieces. In fact it feels worse, as I am sure that the '500 pieces' I have might not all be from the same puzzle, but a number of similarly looking ones!

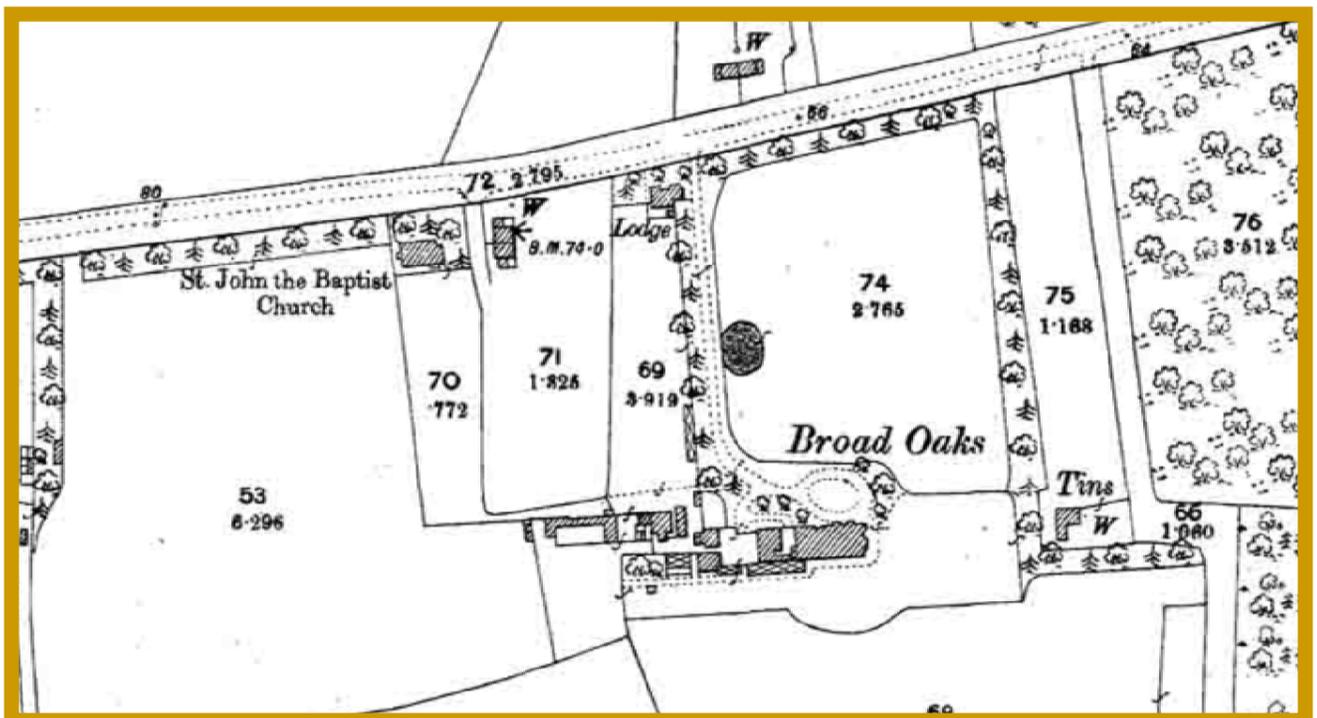
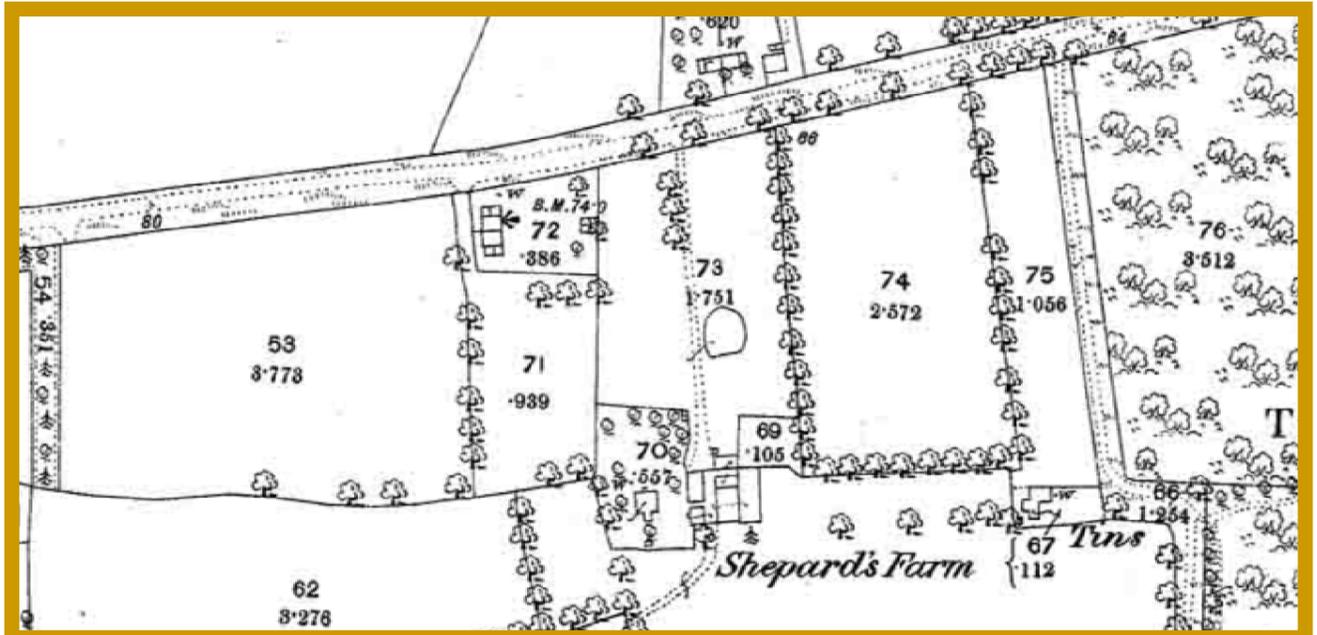
Broadoaks was granted Grade II listed status by English Heritage on the 2nd July 1997. Their records (britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-468757-broadoaks-surrey) note that the 'detached country house, recently used as offices' was built in '1876 by Ernest Seth-Smith for his elder brother Charles, incorporating part of an older house on the ground floor'.

The 'older house' was obviously Shepard's Farm, but who was Ernest Seth Smith – or for that matter his older brother Charles?

All I can find out about Ernest is that he was born on the 18th May 1852 and married Dora Helen, daughter of Ludwig Verner Helms, of Denmark, on the 14th July 1886 – he dying on the 8th May 1940 at Caisson House, Combe Bay, Bath, with Dora passing away on the 1st February 1949.

If he was an architect then Broadoaks is the only property I have been able to find that he designed, although other members of the Seth-Smith family were both architects and builders – notably the founder of the Seth-Smith family, a man from Wiltshire called Seth Smith who travelled to London in the late 18th century and apparently made his fortune building much of Belgravia.

On Charles I found a little bit more, with a notice in the London Gazette from January 1894 addressed to any creditors. He died on the 29th January with the notice recording that he was 'formerly of Broadoaks, Byfleet, in the county of Surrey, but late of Little Missenden Abbey, Missenden, in the county of Buckinghamshire, and of the Pantechnicon, Motcombe Street, Belgrave Square, in the county of London'.



Little Missenden Abbey, designed by W H Seth-Smith

It also noted that he was a Barrister-at-Law of the Inner Temple, where I later discovered that he had practiced in the Admiralty Court since 1887, having been made a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Artillery Volunteers in 1876 and lieutenant in command of the London corps from 1884 to 1892.

I further discovered that he was born on the 26th February 1847, the eldest son of Charles Edward Seth Smith of Silvermere in Cobham, and married Florence Maude (daughter of John Stevenson of Wester Rossland, Renfrewshire) on the 1st June 1882 (who died 11th January 1890).

I mentioned above that the original Seth Smith built property in Belgravia, including the Pantechnicon, so our Charles obviously liked to live in family-built properties, a fact that was reinforced when I discovered that his final home at Little Missenden Abbey was designed by his cousin, William Howard Seth-Smith (who

built many schools and chapels throughout Surrey and the South East). But this threw up a question – just how long did Charles Seth-Smith stay at Broadoaks before moving on to Little Missenden? The answer could be not long, as in the Post Office Directory for Surrey in 1878 it lists not Charles as living at Broadoaks, but a 'Mrs Cator'.

Who Mrs Cator was I am afraid I don't know, the 1881 census (when I get a chance to view it) may supply some answers, but although she was evidently still at Broadoaks the following year (according to my 1882 Kelly's Directory) she appears to have moved on by 1891 when Major William Alfred Collis Browne had become resident.

Leonard Stevens in his 'Byfleet – A Village in England' shed some light on the next part of the story when he says that after Charles Seth-Smith 'Major Collis Browne became the tenant. Later he bought the property and made extensive alterations to it'. But Byfleet's other historian, Howard Cook, managed to send me on a wild goose chase when he recorded in the local Residents' Association's newsletters (and subsequently published in booklet form), that 'it passed to. Major Collis Browne, who achieved fame with Chlorodyne; this, according to the writer's 1892 Enquire Within about Everything, was excellent for almost all ills from coughs, consumption, cancer and dysentery to gout and toothache to name a few'.

I merrily went off researching Collis Browne and his Chlorodyne until I realised that it was Dr Collis Browne and not Major Collis-Browne who was producing the famous cure-all. I still don't know whether the two were related.

That the good Major (William Arthur) was in residence by 1886 is evident by the fact that the Parish Magazine in July that year reported that 'on the 13th, Major and Mrs. Collis Browne gave a treat for all the school children and the Industrial School boys. Although the entertainment lasted for five hours it was never difficult to amuse the children, because so many things were provided for the purpose, a round-about, swings, cocoanuts, Zulus, a band and an almost unlimited supply of sweets'.

I have no idea what the 'Zulus' were doing, but the Collis-Browne's seem to have gone to quite an expense.

Also in that year the Major offered to pay one third of the cost of erecting a pavilion for Byfleet Cricket Club, although whether that offer was taken up or not is not known as the minutes of the club from that period are missing.

I wasn't able to find too much more about the Collis-Browne's other than little snippets such as the fact that (according to the Gardener's Chronicle), they were evidently employing in 1892 and 1894 Mr George Carpenter as their gardener.

The interesting thing about that is that later (presumably after the Collis-Browne's left), George Carpenter was the gardener to the Stoop's, next door at West Hall, where apparently between 1915 and 1930 he bred more new varieties of apple tree than anyone else at that time, six being released onto the market including a dessert apple called George Carpenter (a cross between a Blenheim Orange and the King of the Pippins).

In 1898, according to English Heritage, Broadoaks was sold to Sir Charles Tennant, a 'wealthy industrialist and patron of the arts



who, aged 75, had just married his 2nd wife Marguerite who was to bear him 4 children'.

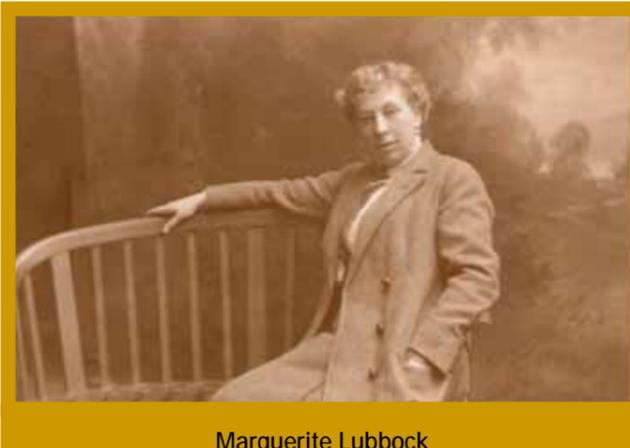
Sir Charles' first wife, Emma, had died in 1895 so presumably the move to Broadoaks with Marguerite Agarante (daughter of Charles William Miles) was part of a new start for him. She was apparently a talented musician, Sir Charles once buying her an antique Stradivarius (now known as the Lady Tennant Stradivarius) as a present.

His wealth, it should be said, was largely inherited, his grandfather being the chemist and industrialist Charles Tennant who founded Charles Tennant & Co, which eventually (in 1890) became part of the United Alkali Company (itself later to become part of the ICI Group).

Our Charles (born 4th November 1823), was at one time the President of United Alkali, as well as Chairman of the Union Bank of Scotland, a Trustee of the National Gallery and the Liberal Member of Parliament for Glasgow (1879-1880) and Peebles and Selkirk (1880-1886).

He died on the 4th June 1906 at Broadoaks, which means that English Heritage must be slightly wrong when they say that he carried out alterations to the house at this time including 'c1905 the south projecting Drawing Room [and] c1908 the east projecting Ballroom' – either the ballroom was built two years earlier, or it was not part of Sir Charles' work, but Marguerite's, who married her second husband Major Geoffrey Lubbock on the 13th November 1907 (Geoffrey Lubbock being listed at Broadoaks in my Kelly's Directory of 1909).

It was at this time, of course, that Marguerite leased the land at Brookwood for the West Hill Golf Course to be built – a 'gift' apparently for her husband, but with the added bonus that it meant she could also play (many golf clubs at that time banning ladies from becoming members).



Marguerite Lubbock



The Lubbock's probably moved out of Broadoaks in 1911, from when we are told by English Heritage the 'brewery owning Charrington family owned Broadoaks'.

This would certainly tie in with local parish council records that show that in 1912 Mr Charrington offered to lease, together with his neighbour, Mr Stoop of West Hall, 'twelve acres of Poor Laws Land at a rental of £30 pa. to provide a recreation ground at West Byfleet'.

The Parish Council were to control and maintain the land, with Stoop and Charrington just paying the Byfleet United Charities the £30 each year rent, but in the end the Charity Commissioners asked that the whole of the twenty-one year lease be paid 'up front', which the two gentlemen generously agreed to do.

Unfortunately with the outbreak of the First World War the recreation ground was not established until 1921 (the ground being ploughed in the meantime to provide food for the war effort), but in 1922 Mr Charrington was evidently back as the minutes of the Parish Council record that he offered to pay for the provision of swings in the new children's playground as well as giving three and a half acres of land for allotments - providing the land was not built on at a later date!

I say 'back' as it appears that during the First World War Broadoaks may have been leased to the Broughton family, as I stumbled across an entry on the internet (I was beginning to lose the plot by now) on the Millicent Library website of Fairhaven, Massachusetts.

It had an extensive article on Lady Fairhaven, Clara Broughton (the sister of Millicent Rogers after whom the library is named), which stated that 'during the Great War, she [Clara Broughton] offered all her efforts to the good of her adopted country, sponsoring many types of war work. She was deeply interested in the well-being of Bethnal Green Military Hospital; and in contemporary English newspapers, we read of hospitable parties given for wounded soldiers at the family home in Broadoaks, Byfleet'.

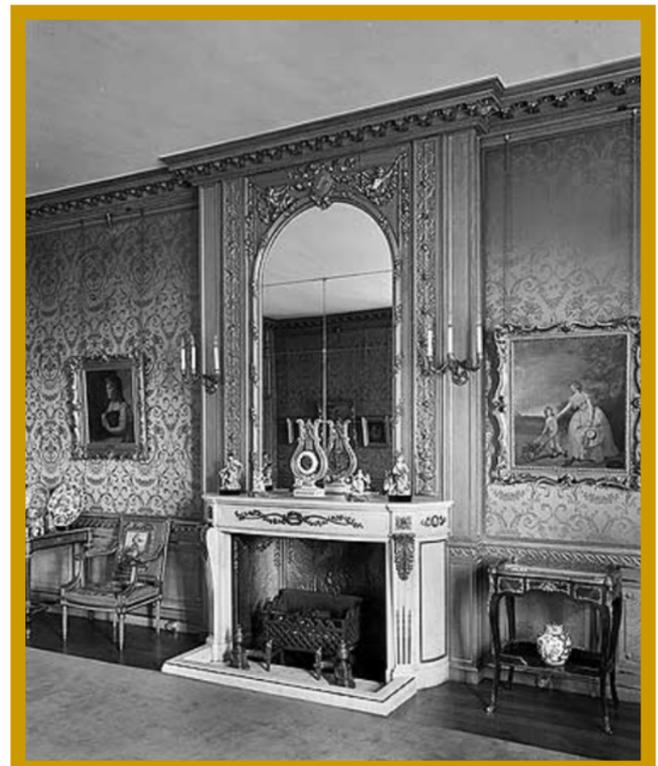
I have seen some of the 'contemporary English newspapers', and they do indeed show that Urban Broughton and his wife Clara did entertain at Broadoaks.

They are an interesting couple but their time at Broadoaks must have been short-lived as the Woking Street Directory shows Mr C E N Charrington once more at Broadoaks in 1919, and 'Charles Edward Nicholas Charrington telephone number Byfleet 56) is listed in my 1924 Kelly's Directory.

Charles Edward Nicholas Charrington died in 1936 (which explains why my 1937 Street Directory only lists Mrs Charrington at Broadoaks), and in 1946 the house was apparently sold (or more likely commandeered) by the Ministry of Supply, with the Army Operational Research Group taking over the house in 1948.

That seems to be the end of the story, apart from one last piece of information I found from the London Gazette of the 13th November 1996 (when the MOD were looking to sell the estate). It states that they were 'trying to trace the successor of the former owner, Mrs. Elaine Charrington, formerly of Broadoaks, Parvis Road, West Byfleet (until 1946)' and that anyone with a claim should write within two months of the notice.

I wonder whether anybody did!



I am grateful to Mr G Smith of Chobham for sending me copies of the photographs of Broadoaks as it must have looked in its heyday. If anybody else has pictures of the building (particularly later views) that I could incorporate into this site, please let me know.

