

# The Limes and the Tinsleys

**Before 1851** The Limes was built on a plot known as Quarry Piece in 1844. The plot west of it, named Limepit Piece, was owned by Theophilus Tinsley, a nail factor and licensee of the Leopard public house on Dudley Road, from which he ran his business. Nail factors bought in small iron rods that were turned into nails by workers at home. Factors paid nailers for their work, and sold their products on.

## Eliza and Thomas Tinsley



Eliza Tinsley, date unknown

Eliza Butler married Theophilus Tinsley's son Thomas in 1839. Thomas prospered in the family's line of business, and a splendid new house was built for them. Tragically, the eldest of their six children, Elizabeth, died in May 1851, just before they moved in; the following month, Thomas died suddenly. Within weeks, Eliza had begun to run his company, and named the house The Limes, maybe punning on Limepit Piece next to it. (A nearby house was already called The Quarries.)

Eliza established a factory at Reddal Hill, and by 1871 employed four thousand 'men and boys'. The company's products were exported all over the world. She lived at the house until her death in 1882, gradually retiring from the business. She was a benefactor to local charities, sometimes working with her neighbour, F. A. Homer. Eliza, Thomas and two of their daughters are buried in All Saints' churchyard.



From MINE CHAIN, 11 inch diameter, length 200 yards, with 21 links, 10 lb. 3 oz. The chain was made by the Tinsley family in the Black Country. Makers - ELIZA TINSLEY & CO., OLD WELLS, SO.

Eliza Tinsley's company made chains in Cradley Heath and made what was at the time claimed to be the longest chain ever produced in the Black Country.

# Owners after the Tinsleys

## The Fowler family

Henry Fowler (1820-85) made his fortune as a colliery proprietor and iron-master. He came from Bilston, then lived at Tettenhall, and bought The Limes only towards the end of his life. His widow Eliza remained there with their son, William Henry (1853-1920), until her death in 1889. When William married in 1893, his address was still The Limes, but between 1896 and 1900 they left to live with his wife Jessie's family in Cheltenham.

## William Arthur Foster (1862-1919)

Arthur Foster (as he was known) grew up at Woodsetton House on Tipton Road. He became a solicitor, with a flourishing practice in Wolverhampton and Tipton. In 1900 he married Editha Greville Prideaux, and bought The Limes as an impressive home for his bride. A governess for their two daughters, aged 9 and 6, was living with the family in the 1911 census. In 1919, however, after Foster's tragic death, his widow and the girls moved to London. He was buried in his family's vault in the Vicar Street cemetery, now a garden.

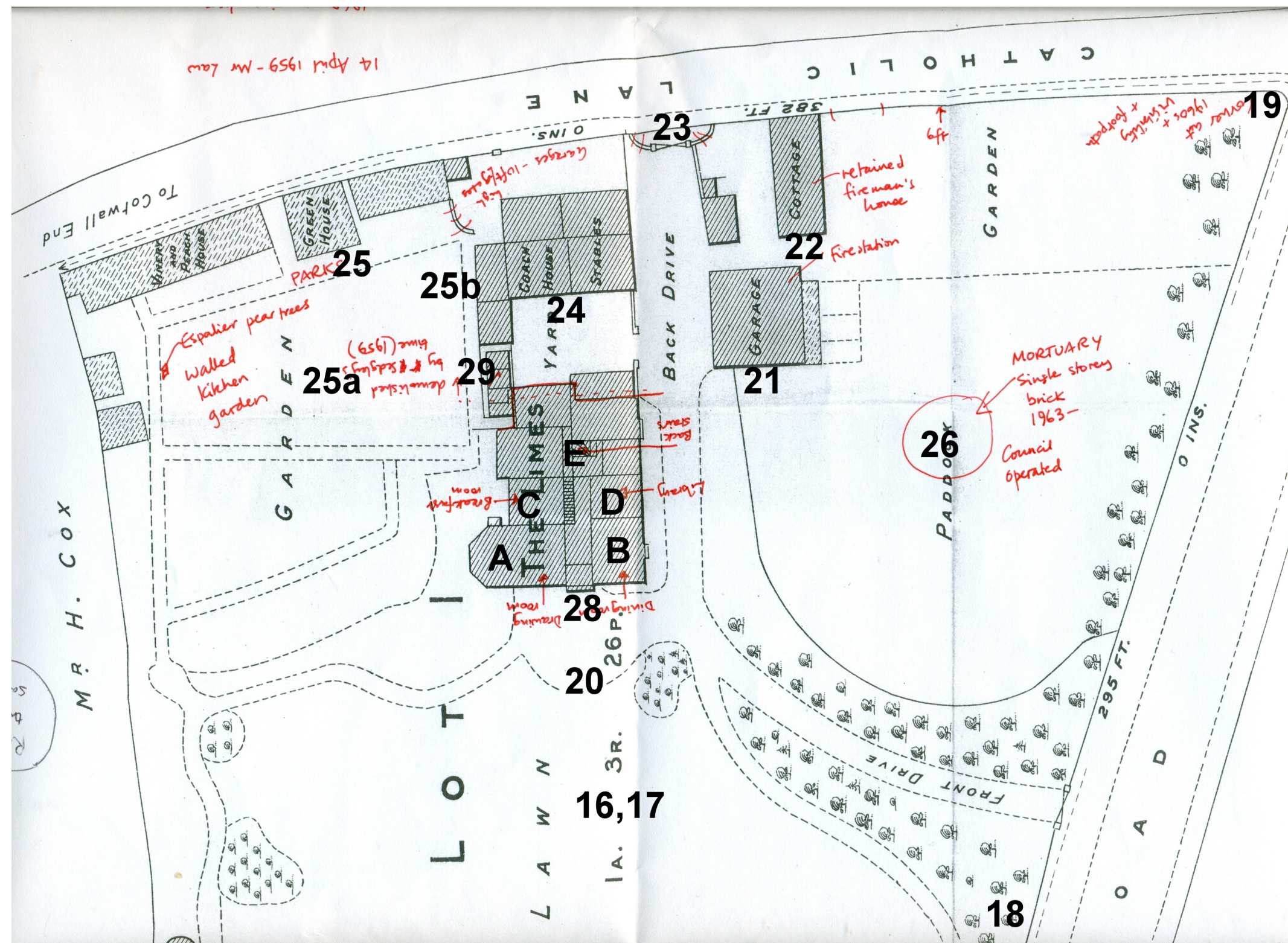
## Eliza Gray Gibbons (1845-1929)

Eliza was the daughter of John McNab Ballenden, who served Sedgley as a doctor for over 50 years. The family lived at Bleak House on Dudley Road, next to present-day Arcal Street. In 1898, she married the widowed John Lloyd Gibbons, owner of Ellowes Hall, the finest house in the district. After he died in 1919, she bought The Limes; her youngest brother, also a local doctor, already lived on the other side of Dudley Road at Holborn Lodge.

A sale catalogue, produced for the property's auction following her death in 1929, gives details of the house's layout at that time. The marble-floored entrance hall offered access to the drawing room (with bay window), dining room, library and breakfast room. Oak stairs led to four bedrooms, and a bathroom with supplies of hot, cold and soft water.

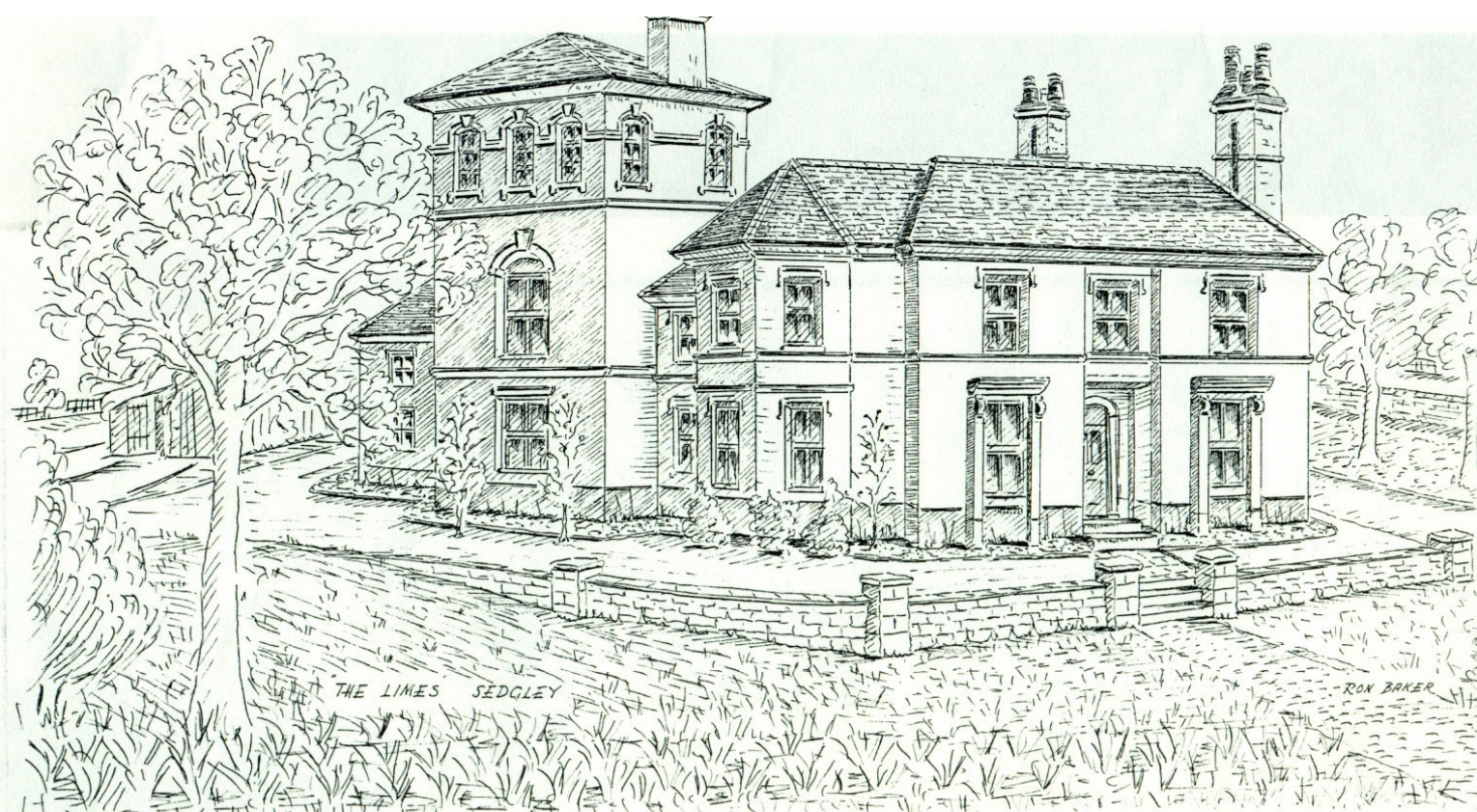
Two bedrooms were also provided for live-in servants. They had their own Hall, and worked in a 'Kitchen-Scullery', Butler's Pantry, larders and cellars. Outside, stables housed up to three horses, and a garage had been added with the advent of the motor car. A two-bedroomed 'Man's Cottage' provided tied accommodation for a male employee, perhaps with a family. While the area that is now Coronation Gardens seems always to have been parkland, near the house there were flower beds (including roses), a greenhouse, a vinery and peach and melon houses, and a kitchen garden.

# The Limes



From private residence to council offices: the changing usage of The Limes . (Plan of the house and garden from sales particulars when the Limes was put on sale in 1929. )

Coronation Gardens (16, 17) were originally the front gardens to The Limes. In the 1960s a council mortuary (26) was situated in the former paddock. There was a Fire Station (21) to the right of the back drive, in use until around 1971, when the Tipton Road station was built. What was marked as a 'cottage' in 1929 (22) was occupied by a retained firefighter. (23) was the entrance used by the Urban District council Parks and Highways departments in the 1960s. (24) were originally the stables for the house, later used by the council to store drain cleaners and mowers. (25a) was originally a walled kitchen garden, used by Sedgley UDC as a yard and plant nursery. The former 'Vinery and Peach house' and greenhouse (25) were used for growing plants. (28) was the front entrance. To the house. (29) was a wall where espalier pears grew. In 1929, when it was still a private home, the room usage was as follows: (A) Drawing Room (B) Dining Room (C) Breakfast Room (D) Library (E) Back (servants') stairs.



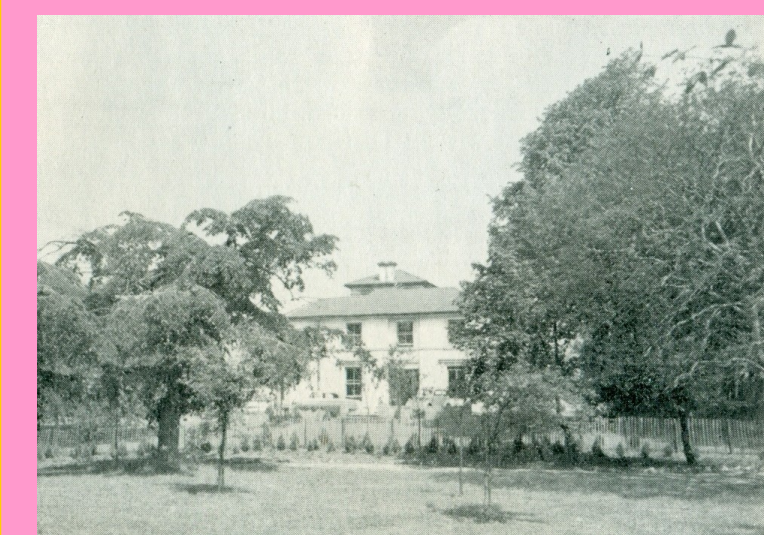
The Limes as it looked in 1947, by local artist Ron Baker.



Gornal and Sedgley Fire Watchers gather for the last time outside the front door of The Limes in November 1944 (left); Sedgley Auxiliary Fire Service (right) who were also based at the Limes.

**Wartime use, 1939-45** In 1936, Sedgley Urban District Council bought The Limes to use as additional offices. However, by 1939 it was being used as the village's fire station and headquarters for the Auxiliary Fire Service, Fire Watchers and Air Raid Patrol. Fire watchers used the tower to look out for incendiaries dropped by German planes.

## Public and commercial use, 1936-2007



After the war, Sedgley Urban District Council used The Limes for its Engineers, Public Health and Parks departments. The Parks Department used the walled garden and glass houses as a yard

and plant nurseries. After the council was abolished in 1966, it was used by Dudley Council entirely for Public Health. In 1970 the property was sold to computer company Compact 3000 who used it for its headquarters. Its last owner, BAAN Systems, vacated the property in 2007, after which it was unoccupied and became derelict until June 2012, when ROE Developments began the conversion of the original house into four large apartments. Four smaller new apartments occupy the original stables area, and two new, detached houses are built on either side of the old house.

**The Observatory** One of the most distinctive parts of the Limes is the Italianate tower. It's similar is design to towers at [Osborne House](#), built for Queen Victoria on the Isle of Wight in around 1845. Its original purpose is uncertain: it's possible the tower was a later addition after the main block was built. Victorian grand houses often included whimsical or eccentric structures that indulged the owners' penchant for the bizarre or exotic. Workers at The Limes in the 1960s describe a set of mirrors on all four walls, angled at 45 degrees on the ceiling cornice, and still referred to the room as the 'Observatory'. Sitting in the room (even allowing for the windows) the mirrors provided a 360 degree panorama of the area.

To read more about the history and owners of The Limes go to: [www.gornalandsedgley.org.uk](http://www.gornalandsedgley.org.uk)