

## A Partial History of Wolfreton Garth and its Residents

Mention Wolfreton Garth to anyone in Kirk Ella or Willerby today and they are likely to think of the private housing estate, built in the early 1960s, near the Church Lane roundabout on Beverley Road, close to Willerby Square. However, some may recall the eponymous mansion house (demolished in 1959) and gardens which had previously occupied the site for many years.

A study of contemporary maps and census records suggests that Wolfreton Garth was built in the early 1890s, possibly on an estate 'through which the Hull & Barnsley Railway passes' owned by John and William Harland. The house itself may have been built for the latter of these two brothers. William Harland owned a drapers and house furniture store in Chariot Street in Hull. However, as a fellow local historian has recently said, "the history of Wolfreton Garth is an enigma". That is certainly true about its early history, as there seem to be few relevant, extant records for the property for this period. More research is required here to provide the required evidence and clarity.



**Wolfreton Garth (date unknown)**

At first sight, the house, pictured left, looks much older than it actually is - its architectural style has been described as 'Jacobethan'. If built around 1890, it post-dates its lodge by around three decades. The former lodge on Beverley Road, still stands near the entrance to Bladon's Walk. Built in a similar architectural style, it is stated to have been built around 1860 'in white brick with unusual "Dutch

style" gables and interesting chimneys'. If the dating is accurate, then the early history of the Lodge is another mystery that remains to be unravelled. Also, adding to the confusion is the possibility that the main house may have been known as Wolfreton Lodge during its early history.

We are on much safer ground when it comes to the more recent history of the main house. Within living memory, it is known to have been occupied by the Bladon family who, like the Harlands, were owners of a department store in Hull. John McKno Bladon owned the house from the 1920s until his death in 1956.



**The Lodge**

John's father, Francis Finch Bladon, who had been a wool merchant in Exeter, Devon, came to Hull in 1884 to acquire a drapery and furnishing business. Hull, at that time, was a thriving town full of opportunity for an aspiring entrepreneur. Francis had no known previous connection with Hull as far as is known. He had been born in 1838 in Walsall, Staffordshire but had moved to the south-west following his marriage, in 1862, to Margaret Craig McKno of Honiton, Devon.

By 1892, Francis Bladon had built up a successful business in Hull described as, 'Bladon, F. F. & Son, drapers, silk mercers, cabinet makers, furniture removers, carpet factors, dressmakers, &c. 37-41 Prospect Street'. They called their store 'The Hull Bon Marche', perhaps with aspirations to emulate the success of the prestigious Parisian store, *Au Bon Marche*, established in 1838. By 1900, Francis Bladon's son, John McKno Bladon had joined the business and the family was resident in Westbourne Avenue, Hull. On 19<sup>th</sup> April 1898, John Bladon married Ethel Dickinson at Gosforth Parish Church in Northumberland and, by 1911, a daughter, Edith Margaret (1899), and two sons, Frank McKno (1902)

and John Dickinson (1907), had been born. By this time, the three generations were living at 'Hornbeams' in Sutton-on-Hull.

During this period, Francis Bladon had begun to acquire land and property and, in 1905, commenced the building of five houses on the corner of Exeter Street in Cottingham. As a former resident of Exeter, it is probable that the street was named in memory of those earlier days. The adjacent Devon Street and Cornwall Street may also recall his and his wife's former life in the south-west.



**Bladon & Son: The Hull Bon Marche, 38-41 Prospect Street**

Francis Finch Bladon died in Sutton in early 1922 and, by then, John Bladon had taken full control of the family company. By 1926, when he had plans drawn up for a new 'engine house and coke store', and 'an extension to the east end', John was living with members of his family at Wolfreton Garth.

At this time, his youngest son, John Dickinson "Dick" Bladon, was completing his secondary education at Sedburgh School and preparing to study law at Jesus College, Cambridge from where he graduated in 1930. Dick (he was universally

known by that diminutive) was articled to Wilfrid Barton, a Hull solicitor, and in 1933, joined Rollitt and Farrell, where he became a partner at the beginning of 1934, the firm then becoming Rollitt, Farrell and Bladon. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Dick Bladon was called up to serve with the East Riding Yeomanry, returning in 1945 to pick up where he had left off six years earlier. For the duration of the war, the firm rented a house in Kirk Ella, near to Wolfreton Garth, to store documents and records.

After his return from military service Dick became increasingly involved with his family's interests. These now included property and land acquisition, a branch of the company that had been founded in the 1920s. Their first major acquisition was the West Ella Estate in 1936, and to this day the company is known as West Ella Holdings Ltd. and is now run by Dick's two sons, Simon and John Bladon, the third generation of the family to manage the company. At one time, it was said that the Bladons owned "most of the land between Hull and Hornsea". Although their holdings are extensive in this area, this is something of an exaggeration but is an indication of the scale of their portfolio. The business now operates across the UK from its three offices situated in Yorkshire, London and Bournemouth.



**Bladon's new store on Prospect Street**

The Second World War was not kind to John McKno Bladon's retail business, the large store in Prospect Street being completely destroyed by German bombing, as were so many other buildings in Hull. After the war, a temporary building was erected in Osborne Street before a new store was built in Prospect Street. This remained in business until the 1980s although, on his retirement in 1978, Dick Bladon, who was running the retail side of the business sold it to Great Universal Stores.

Meanwhile, back at Wolfreton Garth, on 20<sup>th</sup> March 1946, the following announcement appeared in the Hull Daily Mail:

Death of Mrs. John Bladon

The death has taken place suddenly at her home, Wolfreton Garth, Kirk Ella, East Yorkshire, of Ethel Bladon wife of John McKno Bladon, whose name is well-known in the business and social life of the city. She was a keen sportswoman.

Ethel Bladon's funeral service took place at St. Andrew's Church, Kirk Ella, and her body was interred in Mill Lane Cemetery on 23<sup>rd</sup> March.

This, more or less, left John Bladon on his own in Wolfreton Garth. His daughter, Edith, who was unmarried, was living at the lodge (see picture on page 1). In the 1960s, her cook lived in the house next door. Edith Bladon was a keen golfer and spent much of her time at Hull Golf Club in Kirk Ella. Apparently, she also enjoyed a game of Bingo and was sometimes to be seen at Mecca Bingo on Beverley Road in Hull.

John Bladon always had a newspaper delivered on a daily basis and Andrew Lang, a long-time resident of Willerby, deputising one day on his sister's newspaper round, remembers being tipped one penny for his efforts in delivering Mr. Bladon's newspaper.

In June 1956, John McKno Bladon died at the age of 90 and, following a service at St. Andrew's Church, he was laid to rest with his wife in Mill Lane Cemetery, Kirk Ella. Wolfreton Garth, remained unoccupied and was finally demolished in 1959 to make way for a new housing estate, which occupies the site of the house and grounds today. A close study of maps indicates that, now, numbers 38 and 40 Wolfreton Garth and their gardens lie approximately on the site of the old house.

Edith Margaret Bladon, John's daughter, died on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1979 at the age of 79, and was interred in the family grave in Mill Lane, thus ending the connection of the Bladon family with Kirk Ella.



**Demolition of Wolfreton Garth about to begin in 1959**

*Note: Investigations into the history of Wolfreton Garth remain incomplete and there may be some inaccuracies in the above account. It has been necessary, at the time of writing, to suspend research in local archives due to the compulsory Coronavirus restrictions introduced by the Government. Although there is strong circumstantial evidence of the link with William Harland from around 1890 until the early 1920s, this has not yet been unequivocally confirmed. Should any reader have some knowledge on this, or any period in the life of Wolfreton Garth, it would be received most gratefully.*

Francis Davies  
23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020