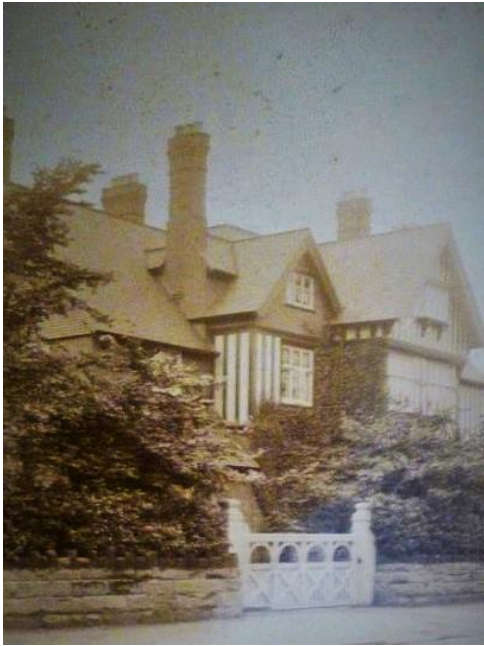


A Victorian Middle-Class Garden



*A modest, but private front garden,
Brackley Dene, Chantry Road*

Gardens were an important part of moving to the suburbs in the nineteenth century. They provided safety from the ills of city life, a rural idyll and privacy. Agnes and Althans Blackwell were a typical comfortably-off middle-class Moseley family who lived at Brackley Dene, Chantry Road, from 1892. Brackley Dene's front garden was modest compared to others with sweeping drives, but its sturdy walls, gate and shrubbery protected the house from the prying eyes of passers-by. The rear garden at Brackley Dene enjoyed a view over Moseley Park, but 'tall trees, a vegetable patch, flowering borders and thick hedges made the house completely private, restricting visibility from the park'. Garden design in the nineteenth century was dominated by 'the battle of the styles', the formal versus the natural garden. Moseley gardeners took a 'pick and mix' approach, scaling down design ideas to fit the space available, but lawns were the heart of a Victorian garden, made possible by the development of lawn mowers.



*The Rear Garden, Brackley Dene, Chantry Road.
The family had a conservatory and greenhouse. The lady of the house surveys the scene.*

Shrubberies, evergreens, such as conifers, easily clipped privet and laurel, and topiary were popular formal 'Italian Garden' formal features. Althans Blackwell bought several shrubs, for example, a Camelia for 2s 6d, a Ceanothus for 2s and a Hypericum at 1s. Bedding-out was a Victorian garden fashion that brought to gardens huge amounts of bright and previously unknown colour. Beds were rectangular, circular, often geometrically complex and symmetrical when viewed from an upstairs window. Althans Blackwell ordered fourteen Tradescantias and sixteen Begonias costing 4s for such beds at Brackley Dene. Herbaceous borders filled with 'old-fashioned' flowers such as lilies were particularly recommended. Althans Blackwell bought twenty-nine roses in 1893 and 1894 at a cost of £8 13s 6d and twenty bulbs and seventeen lilies for 15s 8d in 1895. Roses were combined with new sub-tropical plants brought from around the globe, such as yucca and palms. Althans Blackwell bought plants from the New World including Begonias (Brazil), Heucheras (North America), Camelias (Japan), Clematis (China) and Ficus repens (East Asia). Most middle-class houses had a conservatory and/or a greenhouse that enabled them to display species and raise more delicate plants.



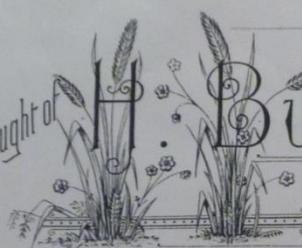
The Fernery, Brackley Dene, Chantry Road

The vernacular cottage garden style was taken up by Moseley gardeners in the form of seats, trellises, arches and bridges. In 1895, 'Mr Blackwell' bought a rustic seat for £1 from Bayliss & Inman, Builders, Shop and Office Fitters and Horticultural Buildings, Stephenson Street, Birmingham. Other 'natural' garden features included ferneries and rockeries. Althans Blackwell ordered eight Ficus repens plants at 6d each, costing him 4s, for the small rockery at Brackley Dene. He bought sixty-seven ferns for £2 9s 6d, about 9d per plant, and cement, red sand, sandstone and tufa stone for £12 10s 6d to build his fernery. Few suburban villa gardeners grew vegetables to any great extent: not growing vegetables indicated gentleman status and purchasing ability. A wide range of good-quality produce from around the world was brought in by the railway. Althans Blackwell grew specialist vegetables, including cucumbers (two for 1s 6d), asparagus (two for 2s and one for 5s) and tomatoes (two dozen for 8s). Vines and

fruit bushes were considered suitable because they were a specialist, contained and skilled activity. In 1894, Althans Blackwell bought gooseberries and currants for 16s 6d and a vine for 7s 6d.

H. A. Blackwell Esq. *Notes - 1897*

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<i>1897</i>	<i>June 17</i>	<i>To</i>	<i>1 Ceanothus Veitchii</i> <i>1 Lychnis Viscaria Splendens</i> <i>1 Veronica Amethystina</i> <i>1 Heuchera Sangreana</i> <i>1 Papaver Bracteatum</i> <i>1 Hypericum Mosecanum</i> <i>1 Campanula Mauresii</i> <i>1 Lythyspermum Proctatum</i> <i>1 Silene Maritima</i> <i>1 Austrian Pinks</i> <i>Box & packing</i>	<i>2</i> <i>9</i> <i>9</i> <i>9</i> <i>1</i> <i>1</i> <i>1</i> <i>9</i> <i>9</i> <i>16</i> <i>6</i>
			<i>109</i>	
<i>Repayment</i>				
<i>July 19-97</i>				
<i>With H. B's Compliments & thanks</i>			<i>H. Burbridge</i>	

Gardening was encouraged for men and women as an acceptable form of exercise, but Althans Blackwell employed a gardener, G. Seeley, who in May and June 1893 did five-and-a-half days' work, which included wheeling manure, fixing the vine, weeding the pond, clipping verges and wheeling rubbish from the yard for £2 13s 3d. Bills show that Althans Blackwell bought plants and other garden requirements in Moseley, Birmingham, Worcester and Westgate-on-Sea. He had seventy-four plants and a bundle of straw delivered by 'Mid Rail' in 1894 from Richard Smith & Co., Nurserymen and Seed Merchants of Worcestershire. Gardens were sites of leisure for the middle class. Families could enjoy walking round, sitting or taking tea in the garden, playing croquet and entertaining others. Larger gardens had tennis courts.

Jan Berry

£1 in 1890 was approximately equivalent to £82 in 2017.