

The Story of a House: Frogmore House, Frog Lane, Milton-under-Wychwood

John A Bennett – July 2025



Figure 1 - Forest Gate, detail of front bay, 2025.

Preface

The house now known as *Forest Gate*, on Frog Lane, Milton-under-Wychwood has long fascinated me. It is one of the most distinctive properties in the Wychwoods, with the added mystery of an unusual terracotta figure decorating its roof line. This article is an attempt to uncover something of the history of this house and its various occupants, and to unlock the mystery of the terracotta figure.

My thanks are due to the current owner, Wilhelmina Church, for encouraging me in this research and allowing me ready access to the property to examine its details. Thanks are also due to the following: members of the Hampton-in-Arden History Group who were able to provide information on the Barnsleys; Diane Melvin who helped to fill out family detail on Mr and Mrs Way; and to Carol Anderson and David Betterton who provided valuable corrections and suggestions for improvements to early drafts of this article.

Introduction

Forest Gate is a substantial house of distinctive architectural style, perhaps the most architecturally ambitious building in Milton, excepting the parish church built in 1853-54. It was originally called *Frogmore House*, renamed *Forest Lodge* in the 1930s, and sometime prior to 1973 it became *Forest Gate*.

In this article, for convenience, I will refer to it by its original name of *Frogmore House*. In fact, the name of the road - "Frog Lane" - is an abbreviation for "Frogmore Lane" i.e. the lane leading to *Frogmore House*. However, this inevitably became shortened to "Frog Lane" and this name was formally adopted by Chipping Norton Rural District Council in 1964¹.

The history of this house is surprisingly little known. Most local commentary on it seems to be from those who recall passing it hastily in childhood due to its "spooky" character, a reputation most probably earned due the unusual "gargoyle" that adorns its roofline; more of which below. This article describes the architecture of the house and traces its various occupants up until the 2nd World War, and their contributions to the life of the Wychwoods.

Build Date and Builder

Frogmore House is first documented in 1881. It is specifically named in the Census return for 1881 and is also marked on an Ordnance Survey Map published in 1881². When the OS map was compiled, it was obviously felt to be a significant property in the village as it is even named - the only private property in the village to be separately identified.

¹ *The Banbury Guardian*, 19 November 1964, p.14.

² Ordnance Survey Map 25-inch England and Wales, Oxfordshire XXV,1, surveyed 1879, published 1881 – accessed via <https://maps.nls.uk/> 21/04/2025.



Figure 2 - Ordnance Survey Map Oxfordshire XXV.1 Surveyed in 1879, published in 1881 – detail showing Frogmore House and its relationship to Alfred Groves’ family home – The Elms. Annotations by the author. The road at the top of the map is Shipton Road.

This OS map shows that the house was already in this location by 1879, and judging from stylistic evidence it cannot have been built very much earlier. A build date sometime between 1875-1879 must be close to the mark.

But who had it built? From the moment it was built it appears to have been rented out, and *Jackson’s Oxford Journal* for January 1882 carries a notice advertising the property to rent (figure 18).

This notice suggests that the owner of the property was Alfred Groves (1826-1914). At this date Alfred Groves, at the age of 55, was the head of a stone masonry and building enterprise in Milton which had been in the Groves family for several generations; the business was formally identified as Alfred Groves and Sons Ltd in 1904. The house is again listed as the property of Alfred Groves at a sale of various properties made shortly after his death in 1914³.

The map detail in figure 2 also shows the proximity of the Groves’ family home at *The Elms* to *Frogmore House*. His company was almost certainly the builder, though there is no evidence that Alfred and his family ever occupied the house.

As it appears to have been rented out from the moment it was built, it may have been built by Groves as a speculative project. A number of higher status residences were being built in Milton in the last decades of the 19th Century, the village developing a reputation as a sort of “resort” for the gentry who wanted to have easy access to the Heythrop Hunt and nearby train links to Oxford and London. *Frogmore House* is one of the more notable examples of this type of property in Milton. Many of these

³ Oxfordshire Weekly News, 17 June 1914.

properties were built by Groves. Other clues in the architectural detailing of this house suggest it was built by Groves; see below page 7-8.

Architecture

The architecture of *Frogmore House* is distinctive and finely executed. I can trace no record of the architect, though another possibility is that it was compiled from examples found in architectural pattern books of the period.

Frogmore House is a two-storey house, built from local limestone with a Welsh-slate roof. It is composed of a front range running parallel to Frog Lane, terminating in two gables. This range is fronted by two projecting two storey bays, and at the rear there is a substantial cross-wing of the same width as the front range terminating in a hipped roof (figure 4).

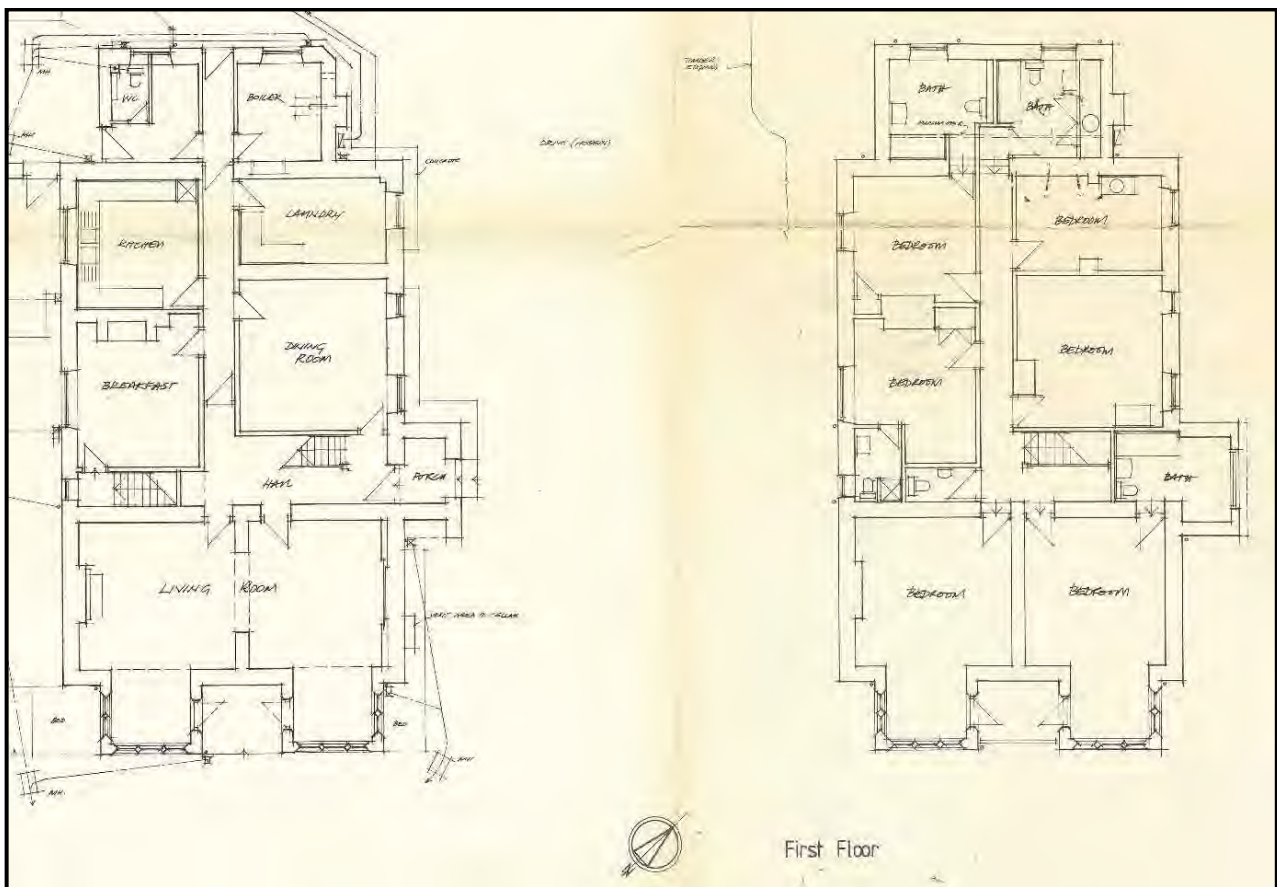


Figure 3 - Plans of Forest Gate in 1984, prior to interior alterations in the 1980s, prepared by Coleman Hicks Partnership in 1984 (courtesy Wilhelmina Church).

The rear has been remodelled in recent years, with a link built to connect the house to the former coach house, and a new stair inserted that provides access to what is now a self-contained apartment on the first floor, providing a holiday-let. There is a further two-storey extension to the rear with two dormer windows at first floor level, probably built circa 1900, from coursed rubble, as distinct from the dressed stone of the main house with dressed ashlar masonry for the window detail of the two front bays (figures 1 and 5).



Figure 4 - View of the rear elevation of "Frogmore House", showing the later extension (about 1900), the central ground floor window was once a doorway. (Photograph 2025)

The most notable architectural feature of the house is the two projecting bays facing onto Frog Lane. These are symmetrical except that the left-hand bay is topped by a steep pyramidal roof, whereas the right-hand bay is topped by a shallower hipped roof. These two bays feature stone mullion and transom window openings. The street facing windows are six-light, and the lateral ones are four light (figure 5).



Figure 5 - Frogmore House, street facade, 2025.

The windows are glazed with leaded lights that contain clear and some coloured glass in a latticework pattern alongside some geometric designs. The forward corners of the two bays are detailed with a slim pencil bead (figure 1).

Internally the stonework of these bays is exposed. This is a feature of their masonry, a neo-Tudor pretence. The painted glass roundels inserted into the leaded lights feature scenes of natural history, including swans, fish, foxes, bats, and flora (figure 6).



Figure 6 - detail of leaded window, 2025.

A timber balustraded balcony links the two bays at first floor level. The balustrade of barley-twist spindles, currently painted white, is probably a later addition. Old photographs appear to show a solid panelled balustrade. A mono-pitched roof between the bays creates a sheltering canopy over this balcony. The balcony is accessed by doors on the inner facing side of the bays, thus giving access from these two first floor bedrooms. The balcony also creates a shelter for the ground floor space between the two bays.

There is a chimney stack on the south-west gable, and there was once an equivalent on the north-east gable, but this was removed in the later 20th Century.

The roof has deep eaves and is covered with Welsh slate, with dark pottery ridge tiles. The peak of the pyramidal roof is decorated with an unusual gargoyle type figure (see below). There is a foliate terracotta finial to the roof of the eastern bay, but this does not appear in historic photographs so is assumed to be a late 20th Century addition.

The main entrance to the property, on the north-east side of the house, is formed by a two-storey porch. The entrance to the porch is through a simple round headed arched doorway. The upper storey has a six-light timber casement window to the front, the gable being filled with faux half-timbering in a diaper pattern. (figure 7).



Figure 7 - Entrance porch.



Figure 8 - Alcove to south-east flank of porch.

There is an unusual architectural detail to the south-east flank of this porch in the form of a shallow alcove (figure 8). The alcove is topped by a piece of weathered stone coving that forms a lintel, it is probably a piece of architectural salvage. It is supported by two impost-blocks with mis-matched moulded capitals; the crispness of these capitals suggests that they are contemporary with the build date of the house; perhaps fragments left over from other Groves' building projects. The whimsical

nature of this alcove with its use of architectural salvage is typical of Groves' work on private houses in the Wychwoods in this period⁴.

This two-story porch adjoins the house at the junction of the front range and the rear cross-wing and continues internally to form a hallway which gives access to the front reception rooms and the rear service rooms (kitchen, laundry, and dining room) and also houses the stairwell. This is matched on the first floor with a similar hallway that gives access to the front and rear bedrooms and bathrooms. Within the ground floor hallway are two more pieces of architectural salvage. Just inside the doorway, aligned with other contemporary timber panelling in the hallway, is a piece of finely carved historic linen-fold panelling (figure 9). At the far end of this hall is a fragment of (timber?) moulding in the form of a modillion cornice. This decorates a segmental arch above an alcove (figure 10).

The stairwell extends into a light-well which tapers up through the attic and is glazed by two roof lights which meet at the apex (figure 11).



Figure 9 - detail of linen-fold panel to hallway.



Figure 10 - carved framing to alcove arch in ground floor hallway.

⁴ See John A Bennett, "Some sculptural curiosities in Milton-under-Wychwood", 2020, published on the Wychwoods Local History Society website: wychwoodshistory.uk/some-sculptural-curiosities-in-milton-under-wychwood/



Figure 11 - view of lightwell above hall and staircase.

The Terracotta “Gargoyle”



Figure 12 - terracotta figure on apex of the south-west bay.

The terracotta gargoyle type figure that adorns the roof of *Frogmore House* has long been a mystery. It takes the form of a hybrid man-beast figure where the cowled head of a man is attached to a hunched animal-like body that has two clawed feet and a tail that snakes through a hole in the ridge tile on which he perches. The tail curls around to the front of the tile and terminates in a shamrock design, a clue to his identity (figure 12).

The origin of this type of hybrid creature can be traced to medieval times, and examples exist in both sculpture and manuscript illustrations (figures 13 and 14). The Victorians were fond of resurrecting these medieval style figures in architectural decoration. However, this sculpture is a little more than a piece of Victorian antiquarianism.



Figure 13 - Capital from arcade leading to the Chapter House in York Minster, 14th Century.



Figure 14 - Detail of illumination from Bruges Book of Hours, c1470, Morgan Library, New York, MS H. 7.

Whilst the form of the Frogmore gargoyle might be derived from fantastical medieval imagery, the portrait features of the face make it something else. The features can be identified as those of William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898), the reforming liberal MP who served as Prime Minister on four occasions and served in parliament for over 62 years. The shamrock at the end of the figure's tail is a reference to Gladstone's involvement with Irish politics, and long-standing support for Irish Home Rule. Every year, on St Patrick's day, Irish well-wishers would present him with a sprig of shamrock.

The *Frogmore* figure is not unique. A number of variants of this sculpture can be traced (figures 15, 16 and 17). There were undoubtedly others.



Figure 15 - Terracotta "Gladstone gargoyle" on the roof of The Limes in Penn, Buckinghamshire. Originally sited on the roof of 'Rayners'.



Figure 16 - Terracotta "Gladstone gargoyle" on property reputed to be in Taplow.



Figure 17 - Terracotta "Gladstone gargoyle" on Wardown House, Luton.

But why is he presented in the form of this hybrid creature and what is he doing on the roof of *Frogmore House*? The deprecation of politicians in caricature already had a long history in print, and there are occasional sculptural examples on some churches and cathedrals. At St Giles in Camberwell there are gargoyles of Lord Salisbury; Gladstone; Lord Randolph Churchill; the MP and secularist Charles

Bradlaugh; and the MP John Bright; and there is a gargoyle of Benjamin Disraeli on Chester Cathedral⁵. But these are of a different form than the *Frogmore* figure.

A clue to its presence is, in fact, in local politics. There was a fierce rivalry between Gladstone and his great political adversary the conservative politician, Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) in the 1870s and 1880s. This rivalry extended to their supporters at national and a local level, including in the Wychwoods. The Shipton-under-Wychwood Conservative Association and the Primrose League had become well established in the area in the later 19th Century. Joseph Reade (1826-1893), the former butler at Shipton Court, was the president of the Shipton Conservative Association from the early 1880s. Following the death of Benjamin Disraeli (Lord Beaconsfield) in 1881, Joseph Reade was a prime mover in organising the erection of a commemorative hall, to be known as the Beaconsfield Hall⁶. The hall was duly opened in 1885. Following the laying of the hall's memorial stone in August 1885 *Jackson's Oxford Journal* reported:

*Later on, some Radical feeling was shown after the removal of the flags, banners, etc by the nailing on top of one of the scaffold poles a black flag . . . it remained for the rest of the day as an example of the bad taste that had been exhibited!*⁷

The phrase “Radical feeling” – was at the time a shorthand for the Liberal cause, and other anti-tory political groups. The black flag is more difficult to interpret but probably intended as a general flag of protest.

The episode shows something of the growing strength of party-political feeling in the Wychwoods at this period⁸. This may connect us back to our figure of Gladstone. The widow of Joseph Reade died at *Frogmore House* in 1895 (see below p. 13), though we have no firm evidence to show that both she and her husband were living there together, Joseph Reade died in 1895 whilst living at Shipton Lodge in Shipton. However, Joseph Reade's conservative sympathies and a wish to counter the “bad taste” exhibited at the Beaconsfield Hall ceremony may have prompted him and perhaps his wife to erect this deprecatory figure of Gladstone on the roof of *Frogmore House*. It seems unlikely that the figure would have been installed when the house was constructed (c1875-79). The builder, Alfred Groves was an important member of the local Baptist congregation, and the Baptists were generally Liberal in their politics. The figure may therefore have been added in the early 1890s.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that the version of this figure that was on the roof of “Rayners” in Buckinghamshire (figure 15) had a similar origination. “Rayners” was built in the late 1860s by Sir Philip Rose, who was a great friend and supporter of Disraeli, hence the desire to mock Gladstone with this sculpture⁹.

It seems a bold act to install this politically inspired figure on the roof of a private house, and we may never know who took this decision, however, this Gladstone terracotta remains as an interesting survivor; a souvenir of strong political rivalries in the Wychwoods in the late 19th Century.

⁵ Worcestershire Chronicle, 26 July 1902, p. 3.

⁶ See Joan Howard-Drake, “The Old Beaconsfield Hall”, in *Wychwoods History*, number 28, 2013, pp. 5-15.

⁷ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, xx August 1885, p. x.

⁸ On political rivalry in the Wychwoods in the later 19th Century see: Margaret Ware, “One Hundred Years Ago: The First Parish Council Elections”, *The Journal of the Wychwoods Local History Society*, no, 10, 1995.

⁹ See: <https://tylersgreenchurch.uk/category/people/page/2/> - accessed 28 March 2025.

Ownership and occupation

From its completion *Frogmore House* appears to have had an interesting series of rent-paying tenants. It has already been noted that Alfred Groves was advertising this property to rent in 1882 (figure 18).



Figure 18: Notice in Jackson's Oxford Journal of 7 January 1882

Edward Gillett

The first known tenant of the house is recorded in the 1881 Census. This is Edward Gillett, aged 29, who is living in *Frogmore House* with his wife, Maria, aged 31 and his daughter Elizabeth, aged 10 months. They may have taken the tenancy a year or two earlier. Living with them were Ada Cole, a “general domestic servant”, and Annie Gillard, a “nursemaid”. Edward is identified as a “Manager of Farm/Bailiff”, which implies he is running a farm on behalf of an owner. Edward is recorded as born in Minster Lovell and Maria is recorded as born in Taynton. Sadly, their daughter died on 24 August 1883 at the age of three¹⁰. Edward and Maria were certainly tenants rather than owners, and they appear to have left the property late in 1881.

To momentarily follow Edward Gillett’s further fortunes, he seems to have fallen on hard times. On 29 April 1895 there is a sale at Crow’s Castle, on the southern edge of Milton-under-Wychwood, of the household furniture and farming implements belonging to Edward Gillett. They are being sold “under distress for rent”¹¹.

Caroline Reade

The next recorded occupancy of Frogmore House is tantalising and, unfortunately, fragmentary. Caroline Reade (1826-1895), the widow of Joseph Reade (1816-1893), appears to have been living in Frogmore House upon her death. Her “Letter of Administration” (she appears to have died intestate), describe her as a “widow of Frogmore, Milton-under-Wychwood” who died on 16 May 1895¹². Her late husband, Joseph Reade (né Wakefield), was the one-time footman/steward (sources give him different titles) to Sir John Chandos Reade at Shipton Court where he was a witness at the mysterious injury and death of the butler, Thomas Sinden, in 1843¹³. John Chandos Reade, on his death in 1868, and with no living heir, bequeathed Shipton Court and other possessions to Joseph Wakefield on condition that he changed his name to Joseph Reade, which he did. The renamed Joseph Reade appears to have become the accepted new custodian of this estate and took on the expected role as a member of the local gentry and patron of many local causes. As noted above, we find him as the president of the Shipton Conservative Association from the early 1880s. There is no documentary evidence linking Joseph Reade to *Frogmore House* other than it being the recorded residence of his widow in 1895. However, the

¹⁰ *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 1 September 1883, p.5 “Aug. 24th, at Milton-under-Wychwood, Elizabeth Ann the fondly loved child of Edward and Maria Gillett, aged 3 years.”

¹¹ *The Oxfordshire Weekly News*, 21 April 1896, p.4; *Witney Express*, 29 April 1896.

¹² Letter of Administration dated 26 June 1895, gives Caroline Reade’s residence as “Frogmore, Milton under Wychwood”, Probate Office, UK Government Probate Records, accessed. Her death is also reported in *The Oxford Chronicle and Berks and Bucks Gazette*, 25 May 1895, where her address is also given as “Frogmore House”.

¹³ Simon Draper, “What really happened at Shipton Court; the death of Thomas Sinden Revisited”, *Wychwoods History*, number 31, 2016, pp. 9-15.

presence of the gargoyle of William Ewart Gladstone may indicate Joseph Reade's connection with the property, as discussed above (pages 10-12).

On 11th October 1895 we find the contents of *Frogmore House* advertised for auction by the son of Joseph and Caroline Reade, also named Joseph. They included:

*“Valuable HOUSEHOLD FURNITURE, Rosewood Cottage PIANOFORTE, 6 Capital Feather Beds, Brussels and Tapestry Carpets, Clock in Oak Case (brass face), Time-pieces, Plated Goods, China and Glass Ware, Ornaments, Steel Engravings and Prints, about 500 Volumes of BOOKS, MANGLE by Bradford, and various effects . . .”*¹⁴

Marian Jane Fortescue

Shortly after Caroline Reade's death we find *Frogmore House* again to let (figure 19).

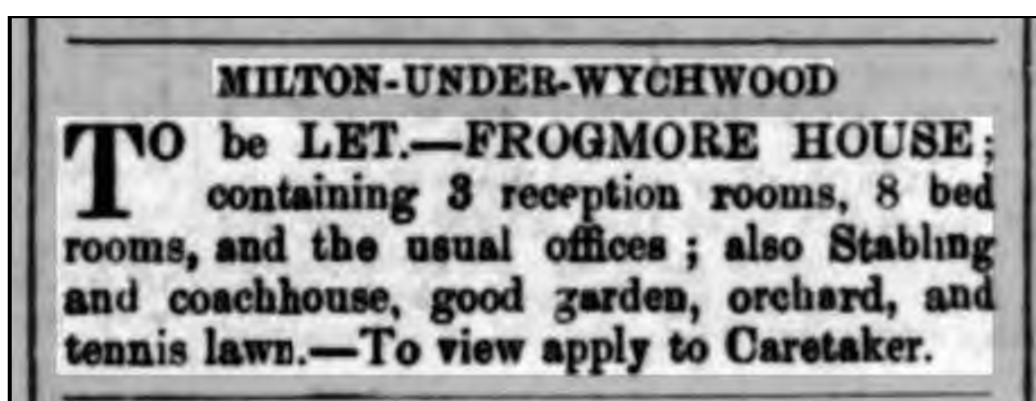


Figure 19 Advertisement in *The Witney Gazette*, 8 June 1895

The next known tenant is Marian Jane Fortescue (1841-1901), who is recorded in residence in the 1901 Census as a widow “living on own means”¹⁵. She is accompanied by two servants. She was the widow of Frederick Richard Norman Fortescue (1823-1867), who held the rank of Major in the Bengal Staff Corps in the Uttar Pradesh region of India. He died, cause unknown, in 1867 aged only 44. His grave is in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh. The couple had married in Darjeeling, India on 6th November 1861. But after only 5 years and 10 months of marriage Marian was left a widow with three young children, sadly the youngest, also named Frederick Richard Norman Fortescue, died in Cairo in 1868, at the age of six months and five days¹⁶. Marian Fortescue must have returned to England shortly after this, and she is recorded in the 1881 and the 1891 censuses as resident at 28, Melville Street, Ryde, along with her daughter Kathleen Mary Geraldine Fortescue. Marian Fortescue presumably moved to *Frogmore House* shortly after the above-mentioned sale of October 1895. Interestingly, another widow of an officer of the English Raj – Mrs Caroline Damant, widow of Colonel G H Damant (1846-1879), had also moved to Milton around 1893 and was living in another substantial house, *Kohima*, (Since re-named *Heath*

¹⁴ *The Oxfordshire Weekly News*, 2 October 1895, p.4.

¹⁵ The 1901 census gives her name as “Marian J Fortisque”, with a birthplace of Bengal, India. This must be a confusion with her marriage being in Bengal. Earlier Censuses in 1871 and 1881 give her place of birth as East Indies.

¹⁶ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 2 March 1868, p. 5.

House) on the Lyneham Road¹⁷. Little else is known of Marian Fortescue, she died on 15th June 1901 in London, though her probate record gives her address as *Frogmore House*¹⁸.

There is another record of an auction of property at *Frogmore House* on 20 September 1907, the lots included “. . . Kamschatka [sic] bear, Korean Tiger and Leopard Skin rugs . . .” are these a legacy of Marian Fortescue’s occupation of the house, items she had acquired in her colonial days? Curiously, the vendor is named as “S. Wakefield Esq (who is going abroad)”¹⁹, was this some surviving relative of Joseph Reade (née Wakefield)?

Mr and Mrs Way

The next occupants of the property that we know of are Henry Edward Hugh Way (1862 – 1926) and his wife, Saralyen Way, who were tenants of *Frogmore House* from 1909 until 1919. He is first mentioned as resident in a newspaper article in January 1910 and is recorded as the tenant in the 1911 District Valuation Survey, where the owner is recorded as Alfred Groves. Henry Way married Saralyen Horton (1862-1936), an American, on 18 January 1887 at Kings, New York, USA.²⁰ Their first child, Flora Abigail Way, was born in Nebraska, USA, on 7 March 1889²¹. The family appear to have lived in the USA for a couple of years, however, by 1890 they are back in England and are living in Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire for most of the 1890s and the first few years of the 20th Century. Henry is described in census returns in 1891 and 1901 as a ‘Poultry Farmer’.

In the 1911 Census he is recorded as living at *Frogmore House* as a man of independent means. Henry appears to have involved himself in local public affairs and was particularly active during the years of the First World War when he became treasurer of the Village War Savings Association, and the local Food Production Organiser, supporting the latter by building pigsties and producing bacon at *Frogmore House*²². Saralyen Way was equally public spirited and was a founding member and first president of the Milton Women’s Institute, who were inaugurated in the Spring of 1918²³.

They also made the grounds of *Frogmore House* available for public events. A newspaper article from August 1919 describes an interesting social event at *Frogmore* hosted by Mr and Mrs Way:

FLOWER SHOW AND FETE. –A fete and flower show was held on Tuesday in a field lent by Mr R. Hartley. . . the quality of the produce displayed was very good. The exhibit staged by Mrs E. Hind (Shipton) and Mr. C Samuda (Bruern Abbey) were much admired. Other pleasing features were the record entries in the wild flower class and a splendid display of garden flowers by the Misses Way (Frogmore). The attractions on the ground were unusual and varied. The school children indulged in some keen racing during the afternoon and afterwards adjourned to Mr Way’s lawn where an al fresco tea was enjoyed by nearly 200 boys and girls. A pleasing incident was the presentation to Mr. Way of a pair of sleeve links from the Village War Savings Association, as a mark of appreciation from its members of his great interest in the movement as treasurer for the past two years. Regret was expressed that Mr. Way was severing his connection to the village very shortly. In the evening football contests of the knock-out system were fought out, bringing Shipton and Milton together for the final. This proved the fastest match

¹⁷ See John Bennett, “Corrugated Iron in the Wychwoods”, 2024, <https://wychwoodshistory.uk/corrugated-iron-in-the-wychwoods/> accessed 03/05/2025

¹⁸ "Ireland, Calendar of Wills and Administrations, 1858-1920", *FamilySearch* (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:KZ5D-G5B> : Sat Mar 09 00:37:33 UTC 2024), Entry for Marion Jane Fortescue and Kathleen Mary Geraldine Bigger, 15 Jun 1901, accessed 2.05.2025.

¹⁹ *The Oxford Times*, 7 September 1907.

²⁰ New York, New York, Marriage Indexes 1866-1937.

²¹ 1939 Register, England.

²² Alan Vickers, Wendy Pearse, June Holmes, “The Women’s Institute in the Wychwoods”, *Wychwoods History*, Vol. 31, 2016, p. 22.

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 22-23.

of the series, Shipton winning by one goal to nil. Men's races followed some providing close and exciting finishes. Much amusement was caused in the tilting-the-bucket bicycle race, one or two of the competitors receiving a shower bath. Dancing on the lawn attracted a large number, the music being provided by the Chipping Norton Town Band. A display of Fireworks concluded an enjoyable day.²⁴

There is a photograph of a Mother's Union gathering at Frogmore House from circa 1910, which possibly took place during the residency of the Ways (figure 20).



Figure 20 - The Mothers' Union Gathering at Frogmore House, Milton-under-Wychwood, c. 1910. We can only guess that Saralyen Way appears somewhere in this photograph. (Wychwoods Local History Society).

The Ways moved to Lydney, Monmouthshire, in 1919 for unknown reasons.

Frederick Craddock

The estate of Alfred Groves put *Frogmore House* up for sale, along with other properties he owned, in 1914, but it failed to find a buyer. The onset of war may have discouraged such sales. They again put the property up for sale in 1919, after the departure of the Way family, and it was purchased for £2,100 by Frederick Craddock, who lived there until his death in 1929. An obituary in the *Oxford Chronicle* for 26 April 1929 gives an interesting thumbnail sketch of Mr Craddock:

On Saturday evening the death took place of Mr. Frederick Craddock at his home at Frogmore, Milton-under-Wychwood, at the age of 74, under very sad circumstances.

On April 4, Mr Craddock was getting some potatoes down from his loft for a local charity, when he fell and sustained a very bad injury – particularly to his head – from which he failed to recover.

²⁴ *Oxfordshire Weekly News*, 13 August 1919.

He farmed on an extensive scale at Eastington, Northleach for his father, and later on his own account, the whole of his business career being most successful in agriculture. He specialised in Herefordshire cattle and Cotswold sheep, and had won a host of prizes at Smithfield and Birmingham shows. He retired just after the conclusion of the war, and for two years lived at Bledington.

In 1920 [sic] he purchased Frogmore, where he spent his last nine years. He took great interest in public work, being on the Parish Council in Milton, and the Chipping Norton Rural District Council, succeeding the late MR George E Groves in the latter office, he was a very active church worker, holding the office of Vicar's Warden at Milton, as he also formerly did at Northleach.

He was of exceptionally strong and massive physique, and was an extraordinarily hard worker. He did the whole of the work in his large garden at Frogmore. "Hard Work" was his hobby. He rendered yeoman service at the great midnight fire at Messrs. Alfred Groves and Sons, timber merchants and builders, at Milton, some two and a half years ago. Although well over 70 then, he was conspicuous for his valiant efforts to save as much as possible, and threw bags of cement about like a youth. Although on this occasion practically all of Milton turned out to assist. Mr Craddock impressed the writer tremendously. In many ways he was very generous, for the local Tennis Club was indebted to him for the free use of his lawn for their games.

A somewhat mild sensation was caused in the village on September 1 1927, when Mr. Craddock forsook bachelorhood and took unto himself a wife – marrying a Miss Duncan from London.

The funeral took place on Thursday at Northleach²⁵.

²⁵ *The Oxford Chronicle*, 26 May 1929, p.

Mr and Mrs Barnsley



Figure 21 - Donald Gordon Barnsley with the Wychwoods Company of the Boys Brigade, about 1932, detail, (Wychwoods Local History Society).



Figure 22 - Florence Evelyn Barnsley, photographed outside Frogmore House, about 1932, detail (Wychwoods Local History Society).

Major Donald Gordon Barnsley (1884 – 1963) purchased *Frogmore* from the “representatives” of the late Frederick Craddock in June 1929 for the sum of £1,350²⁶, a notable drop in price from that paid by ten years earlier. He and his wife, Florence Evelyn Barnsley (née Bateson), lived in the house until 1935. Mr Barnsley was brought up in Edgbaston, Birmingham, and educated at Rydal Mount School. He then went to Trinity College Cambridge to study engineering²⁷. He joined the 5th Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1905 and commanded the 4th Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment during the 1st World War. He was injured and awarded the Military Cross in 1918²⁸. In old photographs he is usually seen with a walking stick. He was closely involved with the Boys Brigade from as early as 1906 and is recorded in various high-ranking roles.

Florence Barnsley (1895 – 1958) was a volunteer ambulance driver in the 1st World War, and during the 2nd World War was a volunteer driver with the Solihull ambulance service. She married Donald Gordon Barnsley in 1919, they had two sons and a daughter²⁹.

In the Wychwoods D G Barnsley became a key member of the Wychwood Forest Lodge and the Wychwood Brotherhood and was an important member of the local Baptist congregation, which had a strong following in the Wychwoods. The Wychwood Forest Lodge was a local branch of the Banbury Society of Oddfellows, a mutual insurance society owned by its members. The Wychwood Brotherhood

²⁶ *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic*, 22 June 1929 (via British Newspaper Archive, accessed 5/05/2025). The report on the sale also records that Mr Craddock’s widow purchased a bungalow in Milton called “The Woodlands” for £400.

²⁷ *The Birmingham Post*, 21 December 1963, p. 3.

²⁸ *Cornish’s Birmingham Year Book*, 1940, p. 388.

²⁹ Information provided by Clive Hinsull of Hampton-in-Arden History Group, see also *The Birmingham Post*, 27 Feb 1958, p. 5.

was a men's social group founded on Christian principles, but non-denominational. They met regularly in Milton in the 1920s and 1930s, and organised outings and educational talks for their male membership, Donald Barnsley sometimes gave talks on moral themes at their meetings³⁰.

Frogmore House was renamed *Forest Lodge* in the 1930s, this may have been a name adopted as a reference to Mr Barnsley's involvement with the Wychwood Forest Lodge. It appears to have retained this name until the 1960s.

The Barnsleys also set up the First Wychwood Company of the Boys Brigade based in Milton, and a junior wing known as the Life Boys. The groups had an HQ at the British Legion Hall in Milton and a clubhouse at *Frogmore House*. There survive a number of group photographs of Boys Brigade and Life Boys taken outside Frogmore (figure 22)³¹. The Barnsleys moved to Hampton-in-Arden in 1935, occupying a large house on Bellemere Road also named *Forest Lodge*³², did they take the name with them?



Figure 23 - The Milton Life Boys photographed outside Frogmore House, about 1932. Women L to R: Mrs Ruth Millin; Miss Dorothy Clifford; Mrs Florence Barnsley; Mrs Mayman. Boys L to R: Mervyn Miles; J. Brewerton; George Carpenter; Brian Collier (Wychwoods Local History Society).

There were a number of subsequent private owners of Frogmore House following Donald Gordon Barnsley, until it was purchased in 1974 by Eric Church, the late husband of the current owner.

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³⁰ For example, see *The Gloucestershire Echo*, 5 September 1932, which mentions a talk by Major Barnsley on "Possessions".

³¹ The Wychwoods Local History Society hold a folder of material relating to the Boys Brigade in the Wychwoods.

³² A short notice of D G Barnsley's death appears in *The Birmingham Post*, 21 December 1963, p. 3.