

The Recess – a poet's fantasy?



Researched and presented by Ken Taylor

The Recess



- When landowner John Richardson sold off plots of land along Wind Lane (Newton Rd) in 1855, W Harbottle bought the plot circled
- This was to become the site of [The Recess](#), originally known as “The Bard’s Recess” after the local poet John Wright who called himself “the Cleveland Bard”
- This is the story of how Wright came to build the house and its history up to the present time

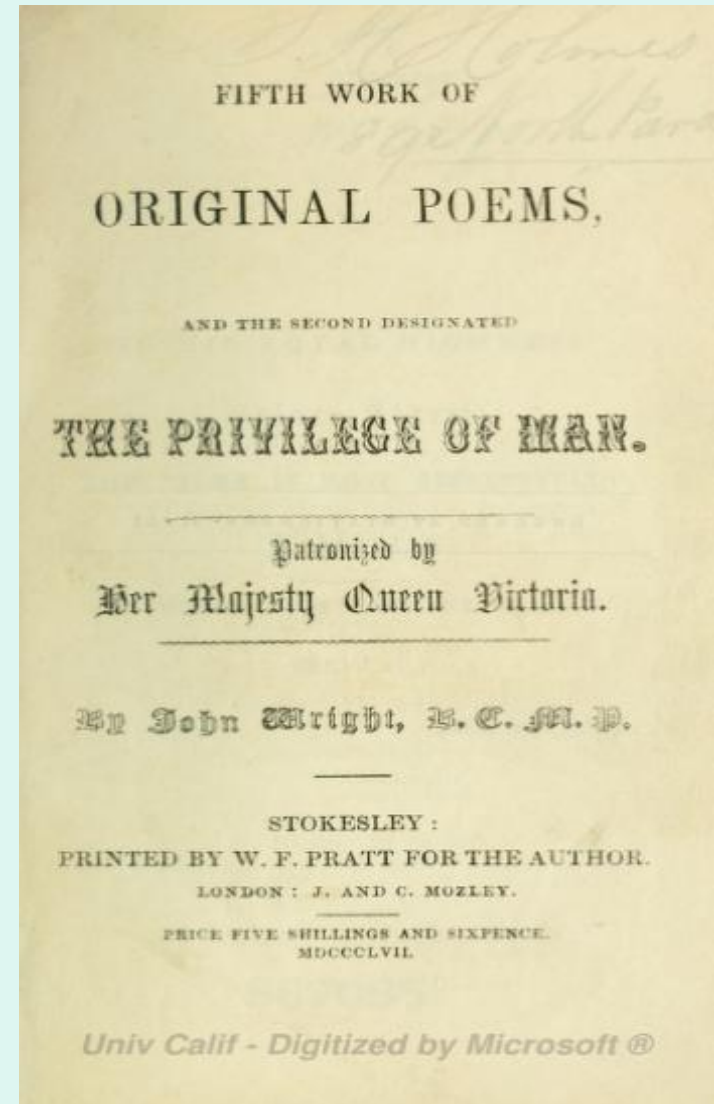
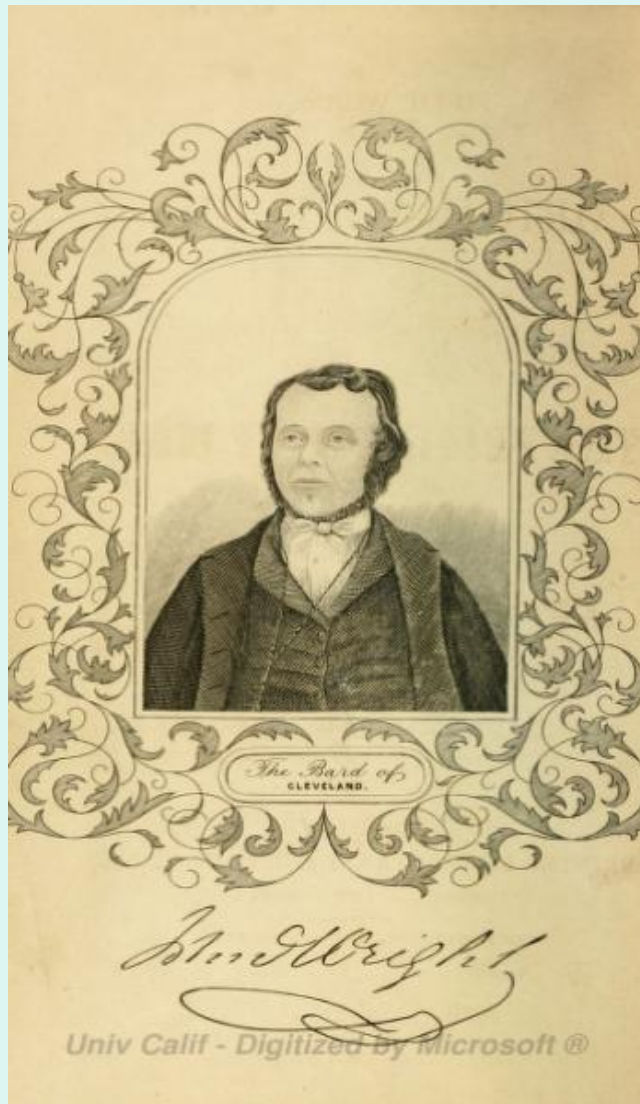
John Wright – his early life

- John was born in Guisborough in 1807
- At his father's instigation, he trained as a hairdresser and practised in Middlesbrough for over 20 years
- John was “brought up to Wesleyan principles of Religion” and it was through membership of the local Wesleyan Society that he met and later married Elizabeth Boyes in 1828
- They had 3 children, William, Elizabeth and Jane Ann who became invalided at an early age
- In 1947 John gave up hairdressing and took up writing poetry
- The family moved to Great Ayton in 1855 and initially lived in a cottage on High Street

John Wright - the poet

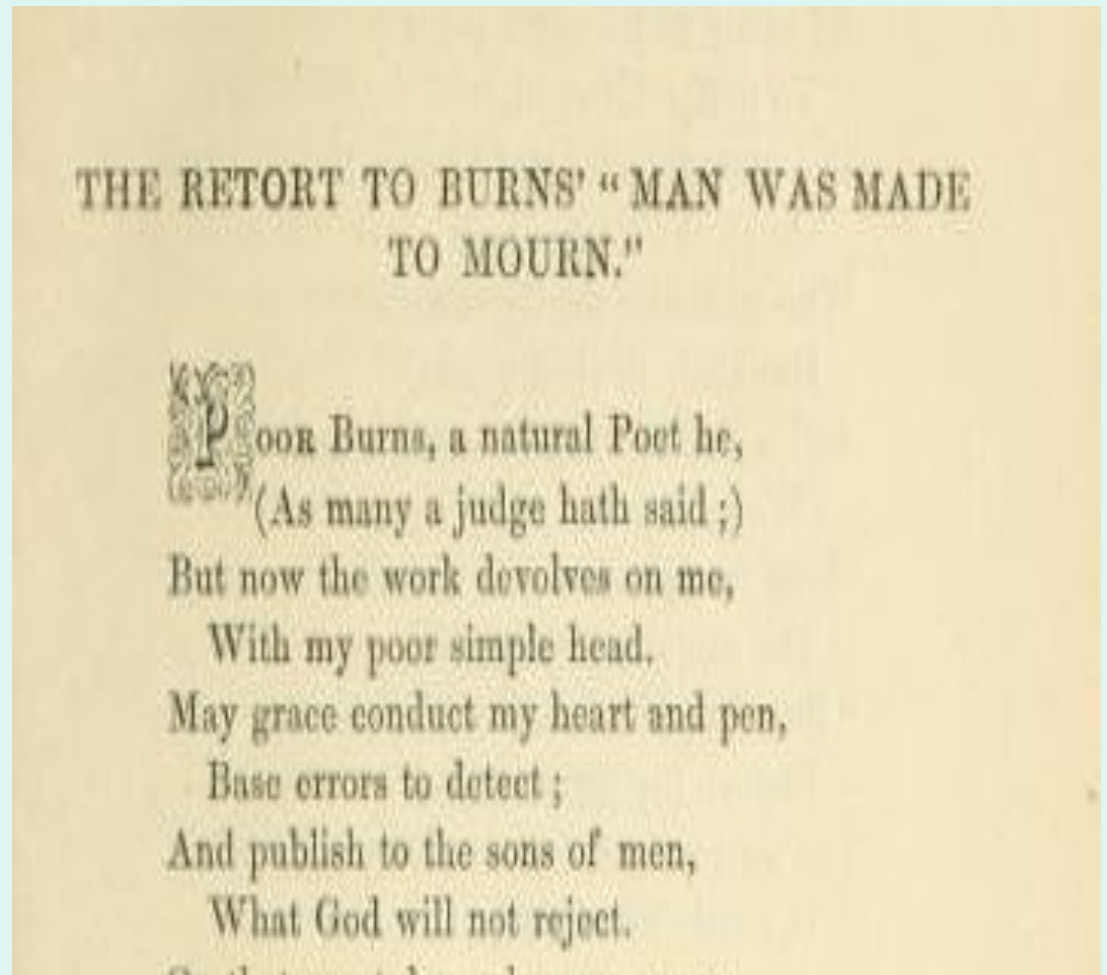
- His first book was entitled “Anacreontic Poems” , so named after the Greek poet Anacreon who wrote in a ‘free, convivial manner’. In reality this book, and those to follow, were highly moralistic in tone and somewhat turgid in style!!
- He had a high opinion of his writing and prefaced each volume with the self-styled title of “ The Bard of Cleveland, Moral Philosopher and Universal Philanthropist”
- Between 1854 and 1860 he wrote 3 volumes of “The Privilege of Man” which were moderately successful and each sold over 1000 copies.
- Flush with this success, he made plans to build a cottage in California!

The Bard of Cleveland



A modest fellow..!

Wright challenges the work of Robert Burns

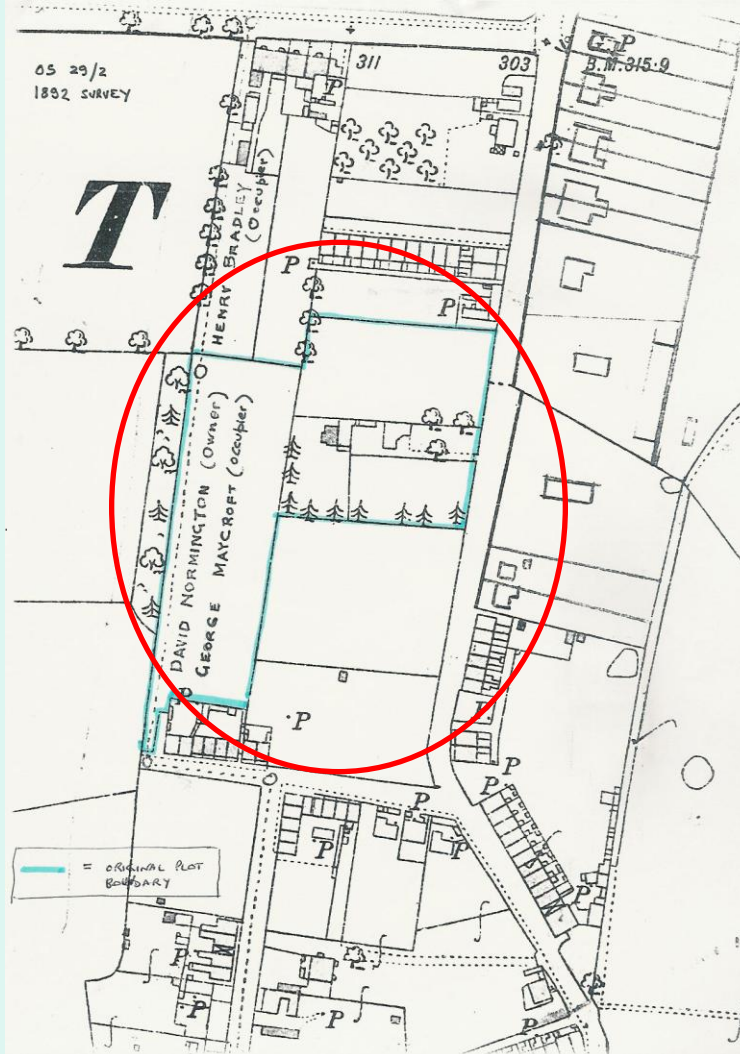


The Recess is born

With the opening up of the California area of Great Ayton, Wright bought an acre of land from William Harbottle in 1860 for £200. He was later to buy another adjacent plot for grazing sheep and growing crops – this was known as the High Wetlands

37
1860. Land in Ayton
March 3rd half an Acre 86 p.
bought of Wm Harbottle
for the sum of 100
paid £1 deposit
Apr^l Back Paems 56
May 14 paid for Land 100
and to Mr Glaister for
the Seeds Making 2.50

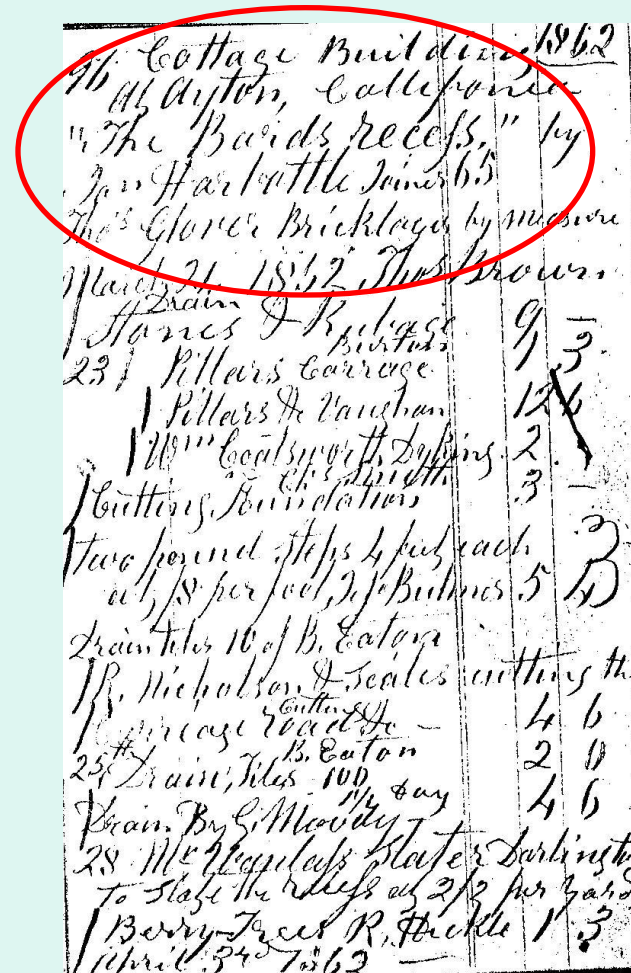
Land purchased by Wright as shown on OS map of 1892



The total plot size including the High Wetlands (where Spence Drive now exists) was about 2 acres

The Recess develops

- Wright engages Thomas Glover to build “The Bards Recess” (otherwise referred to as “the cottage”)
- He kept detailed (if not particularly neat!) accounts of all stages of construction



Cottage Building 1862	
9th At Ayton, Callaghan	
"The Bards Recess," by	
Thos Glover Bricklayer by measure	
March 21 1862 Thos Glover	
James J. R. Kilgus	9 3
23 Pillars Carriage	12 6
Pillars & Vanishing	2
Wm Coatsworth Dyring	3
Buttress Foundations	3
Two round steps 4 feet each	3
at 18 per foot, J. Bulmer	5 4
Drain tiles 10 of B. Eaton	
R. Nicholson & Son's cutting the	
carriage road	4 6
25 Drain tiles 100	2 0
Drain By L. Moody	4 6
28 Mr. Hagel's Plaster & Burlington	
To slate the roof at 2 1/2 per yard	
Berry Trees R. Huckle	1 3
April 3rd 1862	

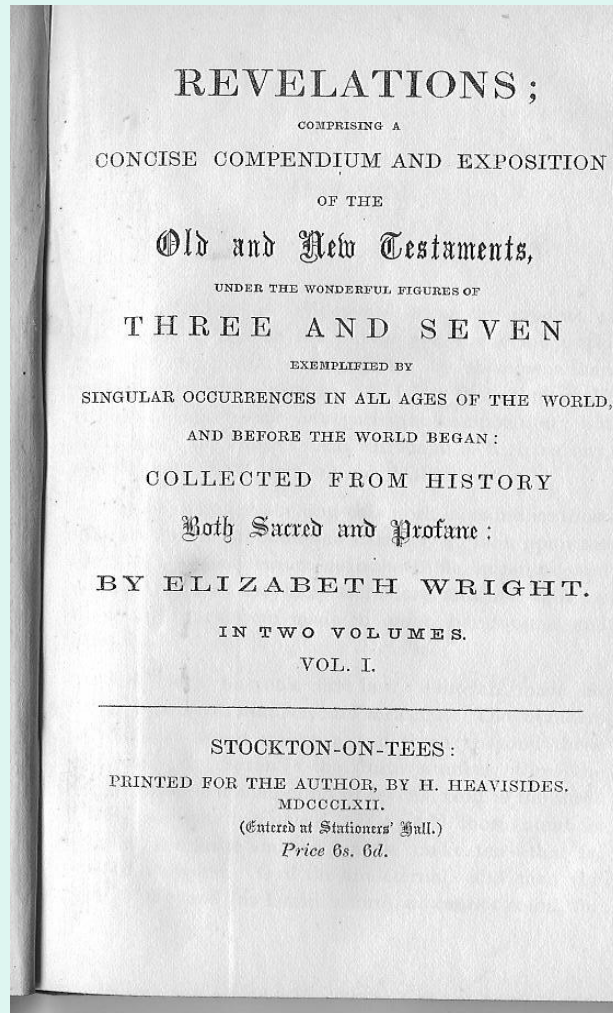
Glover's contract

“ I, Thomas Glover, propose to build a cottage according to a plan by John Wright at prices stated as follows:

Walling - 10" walls	5s 3d per rood
5" walls	2s 6d per rood
Lath & Plaster walls	2s 4d per rood
Side walls	1s 6d per rood
Square brick flooring	2s 4d per rood
1.5 measure chimney breast & ranges	4s 0d per day
Arches, per foot, for	0s 6d
Wall sinking, 12 feet,	for £1 4s 0d
To be completed by 7th May 1862	
All openings in plastering and brickwork to be deducted	

Signed: Thos. Glover ”

Elizabeth becomes a keen Bible scholar



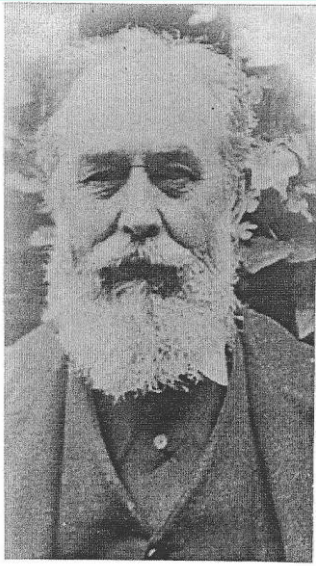
Wright's daughter Elizabeth, described by her father as an "extraordinary intellectual girl", followed in his footsteps to become a keen bible scholar. As a young girl, she had noticed how often the numbers 3 and 7 appear in the Bible. Following lengthy study, she wrote the book "Revelations" in 1862 to explain the biblical significance of these numbers.

Elizabeth describes the design

“.....the house has two storeys, curiously formed with 3 gables, east, south and south-east. The door is in at an angle, with the south-east staircase window and gable above it. Three Gothic arches form the portico, and there are 7 Gothic windows in front and 7 good rooms inside, besides conveniences....”

It believed that Elizabeth helped her father design the house – with her virtual obsession that the numbers 3 & 7 had a some mystical significance, it was perhaps inevitable that they should be built into the house design! The gothic windows and arches were apparently inspired by the nearby Guisborough Priory, though Wright’s claim that he could see the Priory from his house is somewhat far-fetched !!

Elizabeth marries David Normington



David Normington was born in 1839 and set up a watchmaker's business in Ayton in 1862, the year he married Elizabeth Wright. As there was little work for him in Ayton, he soon moved to Stokesley where the business thrived as a jeweller, watchmaker and clockmaker – his premises were at the rear of the Town Hall.

They lived with their 4 children at [The Recess](#) from 1866 to 1887 (with a gap from 1872-1880).



Elizabeth was very supportive of her father's poetic endeavours and accompanied him to London in 1862 to raise funds and find publishers for his books. After a meeting with Prime Minister Lord Palmerstone, they were *"directed to visit the Paymaster General where they were paid £100 in £5 notes.... as a handsome present"*

Elizabeth introduces The Recess

In November 1864, Elizabeth wrote to her brother William who had emigrated to USA:

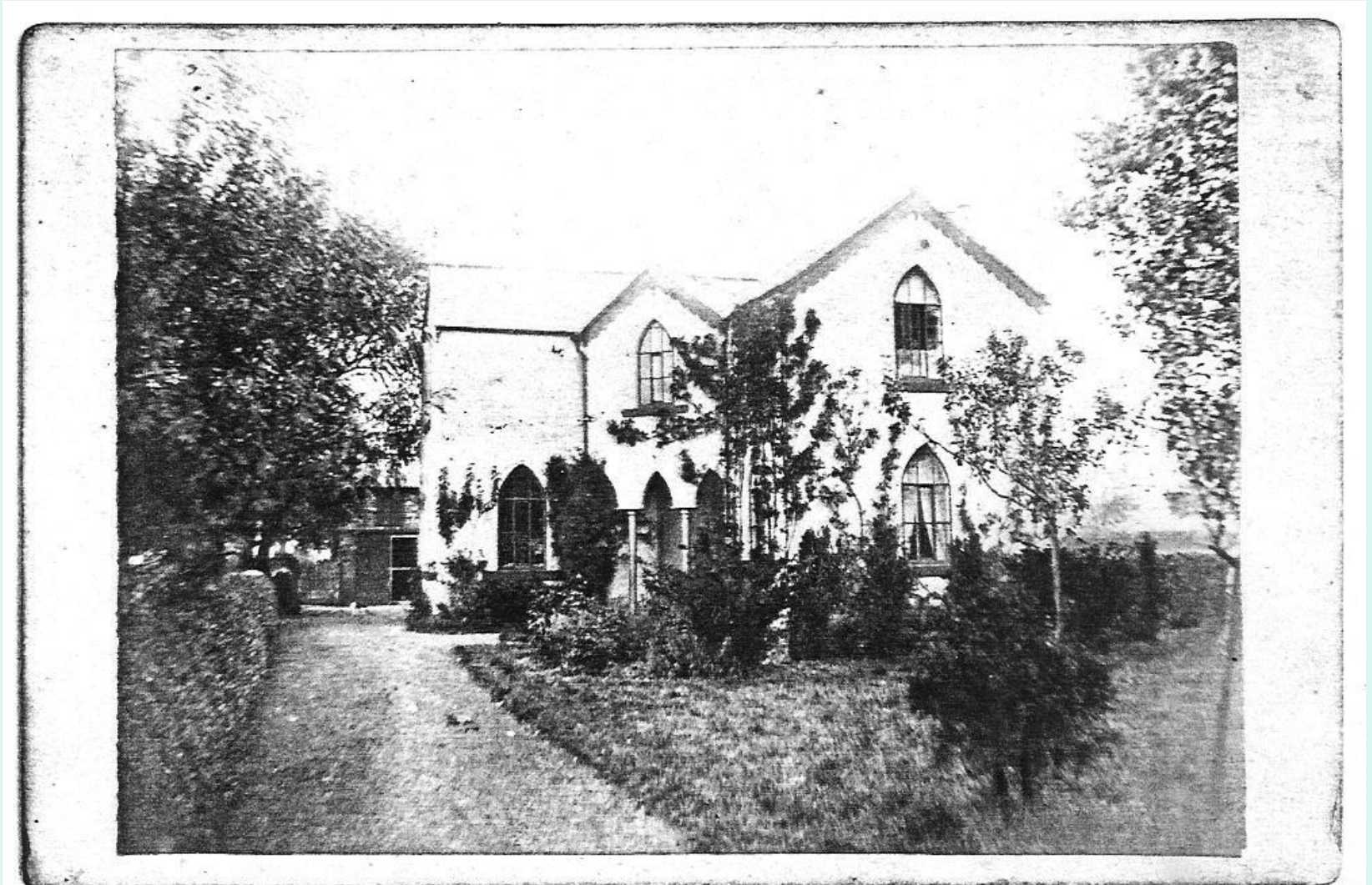
“....did I tell you what a nice house father has built in California? He bought half an acre of land and on one half he grows corn, beans and potatoes for the pigs and themselves. The house stands on the other half 20 yards from the lane. At the back is a garden of fruit trees, apples, plums and pears. In front is a flower garden and shrubbery, with little plantations of fir, poplar and chestnut trees down by the lane. A good coach road leads up to the front door and strong iron gates open into the lane.....”

An idyllic picture!

In 1866, Elizabeth wrote:

“.....The cottage looked so pretty with its garden in front and the field of corn almost ready alongside. Father has enlarged his out-buildings last winter and made a good stable and carriage house. He has a fine black pony. There’s room for a cow and a calf in a stable beside her, and famous lofts for hay and straw. They have a nice little pig too, and Father has bought another field behind the house, so he has plenty of fine pasturage. There’s plenty of good grass in it to serve both the pony and a cow...”

The Recess in 1884



The family move on...

- Sadly, John Wright did not enjoy the fruits of his labours for long as he was hospitalised with epilepsy in 1869 till his death in 1882
- Mrs Wright was unable to manage the house on her own and moved out for a few years, the house being let to the Stoddart family. William Stoddart was a whinstone miner and 2 of his sons aged 11 and 13 were stone breakers!!
- Elizabeth with husband David Normington, and their 7 children, Mrs Wright and sister (11 in all!) moved back to [The Recess](#) in 1880
- When family members left home and Mrs Wright died in 1886, the Normingtons moved back to Stokesley and the house was let to the Maycroft family

George Maycroft



George Maycroft hailed from Norfolk but came to the north east in the 1850s looking for work. He became an ironstone miner settling initially in Newton-under-Roseberry before moving to Ayton and finally in 1887 to live in [The Recess](#) with wife Bessie and 7 children! The house must again have been a noisy place!!

The Maycroft family in 1898



George and Bessie (seated) with 5 children and daughter-in-law

House leaves the family

- The Maycrofts moved out when George died in 1907 and [The Recess](#) was eventually sold to Robert Fearnley, owner of the Ship Inn in Guisborough in 1917
- In 1928 the property was bought by William Hague, a fruiterer from Linthorpe
- Hague sold various parcels of land to 4 ladies who were the trustees of the newly- formed Women's Institute. The deeds stated that if the WI ceased to exist, the land was to be sold by public auction with the proceeds going to North Ormesby Hospital " for and towards the endowment of a bed in such hospital for the use of the women of the Parish of Great Ayton"

Maude Trevor takes over...

- Maude Trevor (described in the deeds as a spinster from Overbeck in Guisborough) purchased the remaining property from the Hagues in December 1945
- By 1946 she gave her address as the Red House (on Newton Rd) and sold 2 further plots of land to the WI.
- In 1947 that piece of land comprising the present site of [The Recess](#) was sold to Isaac Richardson, a farmer
- Then in 1949, Maude Trevor sold the area at the back known as High Wetlands to the widow of William Hague
- So, in the space of 4 years Maude Trevor had overseen the final dismantling of John Wright's "estate" from 2 acres down to around 1/3 acre!
- With the other properties she had bought and sold on the east side of Newton Road , I suspect she was anything but a shy retiring spinster!

Up to the present time...

- **The Recess** passed through several hands before the present owners purchased the property in 1981
- Earlier owners had substantially rebuilt and modernised the kitchen block
- In 1987, the rear of the house was extended to provide extra bedroom accommodation and create a feature dining space



The Recess lives on!!

