

68 HIGH STREET BRIERLEY HILL

HERITAGE OPEN DAY

Waldrons

SOLICITORS

Funded by



HM Government



Historic England



Dudley
Metropolitan Borough Council

68 HIGH STREET

(125 STREET ON THE 1881 CENSUS)

No.68 High Street was constructed as a bank between c1875 and 1880 and appears to have been a multi-occupancy building given it has two separate entrances. Over the years it has been occupied by three different bank branches, used as a solicitor's office and occupied by two different physicians/surgeons. In 2023 it was converted into residential use.

ARCHITECTURE

Exterior

The frontage is render over brick with numerous moulded adornments, of mainly classical style.



68 High Street in 2024 after it had been repaired thanks to funding through the Brierley Hill High Street Heritage Action Zone.

Ground floor

The ground floor has three sash windows with 'depressed' or 'three-centred' arches and S-shaped central keystones. A decorative horizontal string course curves upwards to run through the middle of the keystones.

A virtually plain horizontal entablature (between the ground floor and first floor windows) runs across the whole frontage.

Vertical pilasters (tall, flat strips with capitals and bases that are attached to the wall, giving the impression of columns, but performing no structural function) decorate each side of the windows and door. Each pilaster has simple Tuscan-style capitals and bases.

The ground floor front wall appears to slightly protrude from the upper floors and has four pilasters with basic concave capitals.

First floor

The first floor has two sash windows with decorative lugged-shaped architraves above the 'depressed' or 'three-centred' arches.

The three main pilasters from the ground floor continue up to the top of the building. They are crossed by a string course between the first and second floor windows, the central one appearing to incorporate a metal anchor plate. Such plates were used on exterior walls of masonry buildings for structural reinforcement against lateral bowing.

Second floor

The second floor has two smaller sash windows, with decorative semi-circular architraves and keystones. The bottom of the moulded arches, level with the string course, include decorative 'stops'.

Interior



In the low-ceilinged cellar, what appear to be substantial light-coloured stone footings of the previous buildings on the site still remain. A low stone shelf survives, a 'cooling shelf' from the pre-refrigeration days. There are also one or two shallow semi-circular arches built into the walls, most probably there for structural reasons.

The floor covering of much of both the cellar and ground floor is square red brick tiles.

Cellar steps of 68 High Street.

Ground Floor

MEMORIAL TOWER

At ground floor, in the rear elevation there are what appear to be the original sliding sash windows and internally there are a couple of pointed arches surviving in the corridors. Also intact at ground floor is the original bank vault, which contain two safes, one manufactured by Samuel Withers & Co. from West Bromwich and the other manufactured locally in Brierley Hill by Longland & Co.



Samuel Withers & Co. safe door

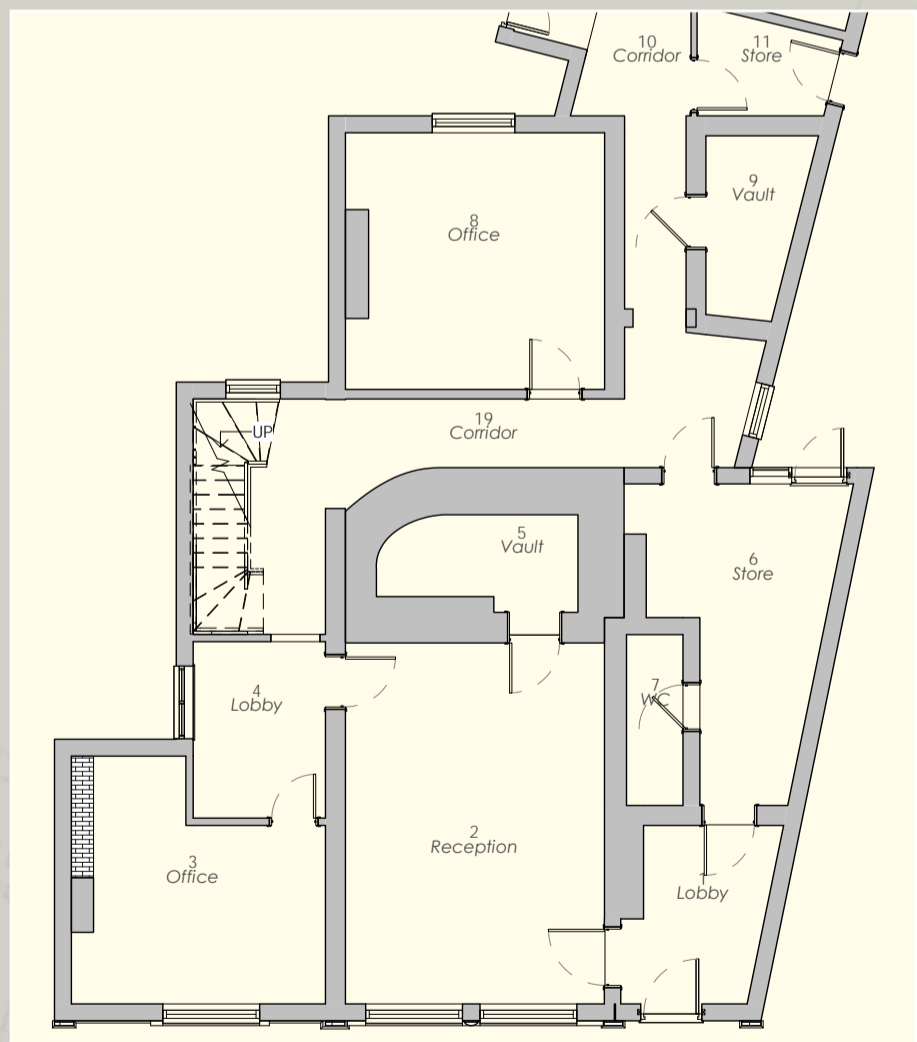


Longland & Co. safe door

The original staircase still survives. It is an attractive open-string, straight-run staircase with slender, alternate shaped and plain wood-turned balusters leading up to a galleried landing on the first floor. It has a graceful curved handrail around the plain newel post at the bottom.



Staircase



Ground floor of No.68 c.2022, prior to its conversion, with intact bank vault.

HISTORY OF SITE PRIOR TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CURRENT BUILDING

William Fowler's map of 1822 suggests that the section of High Street occupied by No. 68 was a collection of houses and gardens possibly owned by the Guttery family. Records indicate the buildings included a couple of school rooms, a carpenter's shop, a slaughter house, a brass foundry, and a steam engine.

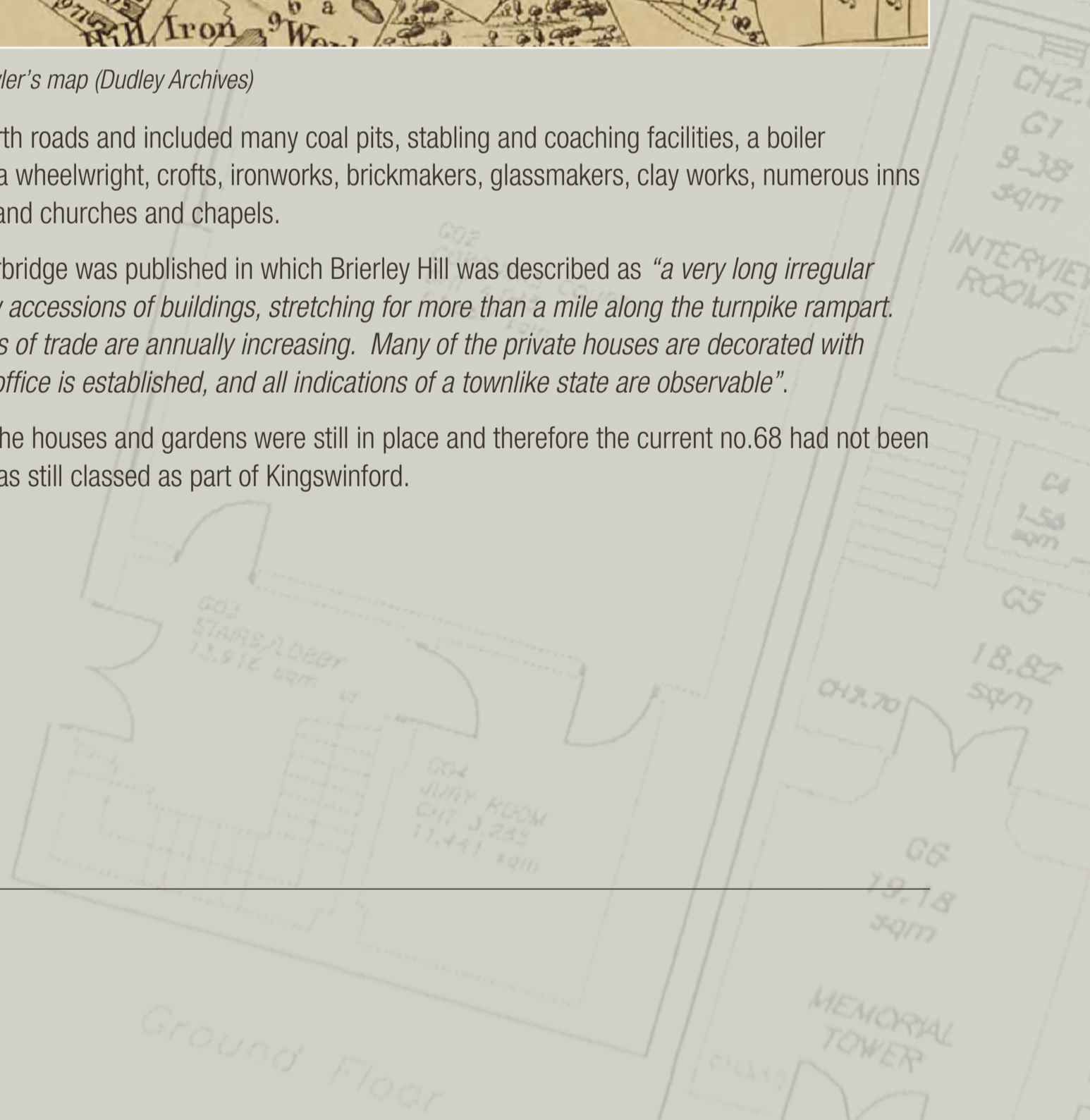


Extract from the digitised 1822 Fowler's map (Dudley Archives)

In 1822 the district had just earth roads and included many coal pits, stabling and coaching facilities, a boiler manufactory, shops, a pottery, a wheelwright, crofts, ironworks, brickmakers, glassmakers, clay works, numerous inns and beerhouses, a malthouse, and churches and chapels.

In 1828 Scott's History of Stourbridge was published in which Brierley Hill was described as "a very long irregular street continually receiving new accessions of buildings, stretching for more than a mile along the turnpike rampart. Shops exhibiting various articles of trade are annually increasing. Many of the private houses are decorated with contiguous plantations, a post office is established, and all indications of a townlike state are observable".

The 1871 census tells us that the houses and gardens were still in place and therefore the current no.68 had not been built. At this time Brierley Hill was still classed as part of Kingswinford.



BANKS

Birmingham Banking Company

At the Stourbridge & Kidderminster Bank board meeting on 28 June 1875, plans submitted by Charles A Horton for a new Brierley Hill branch were approved (the branch had been operating from above the Brierley Hill Advertiser offices). Mr Horton was a longstanding builder in Brierley Hill, working well into the 1900s (see St Michael's Churchyard Trail for more information about him).

In 1880 the Stourbridge & Kidderminster Bank was taken over by the Birmingham Banking Company. The 1881 census tells us that No.68 was occupied by a bank manager, Joseph Finney. Although the name of the bank is not given, it appears it was a branch of the Birmingham Banking Company as, in 1891 and 1901, Mr Finney was the manager of the larger Metropolitan Bank branch further along the High Street, which had taken over the Birmingham Banking Company. This went on to become the Midland Bank and finally HSBC.

The census records for 1891 and 1911 tell us that No.68 was uninhabited.



1882 Town Plan reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

Lloyds Bank

Lloyds Bank opened a branch at no.68 in May 1914. The 1921 census then tells us that the caretaker of the branch, Sarah Longmore, and her family lived on the bank premises. By 1934 Lloyds had moved further up the High Street.

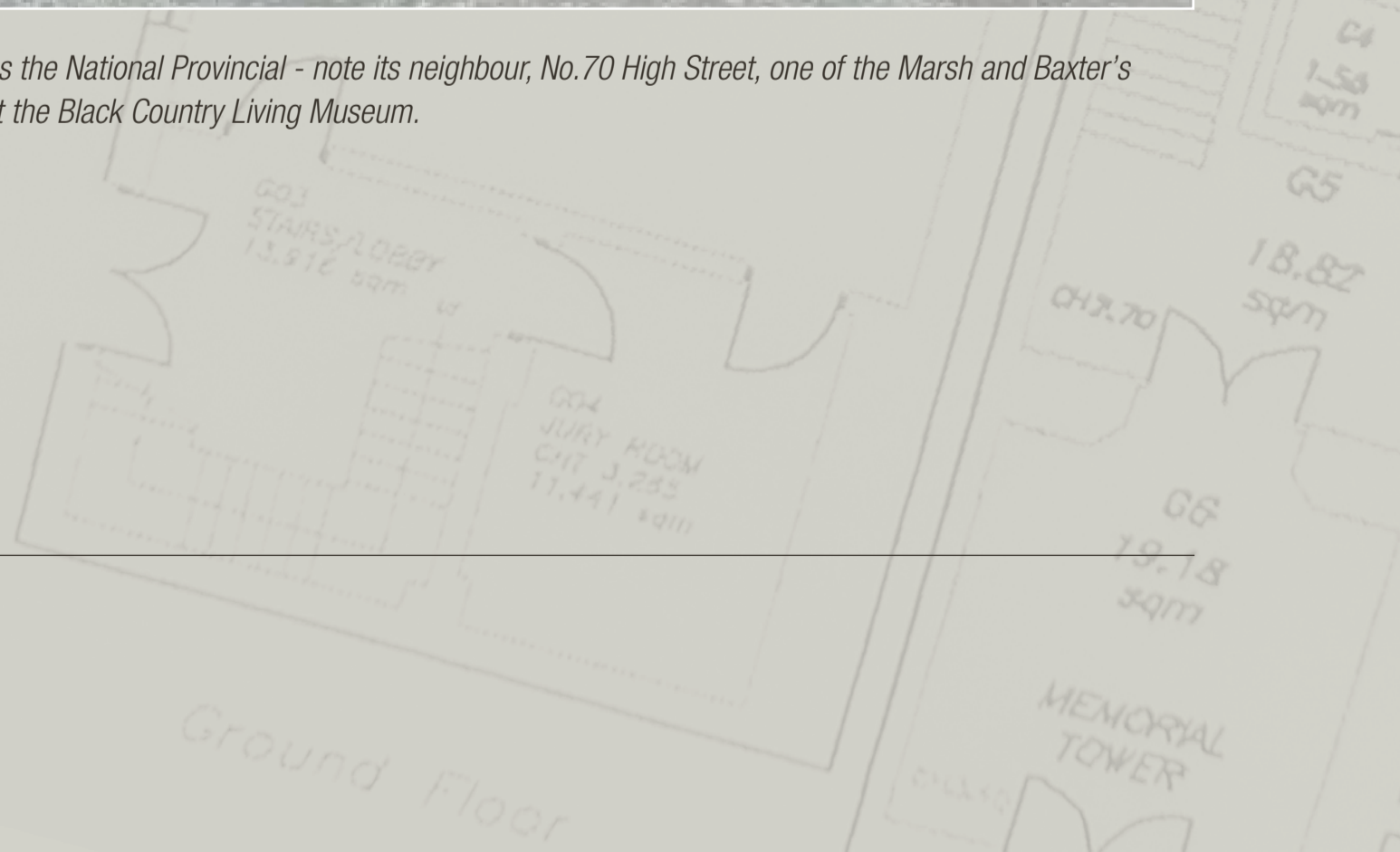
National Provincial Bank

The National Provincial's branch at no.68 was opened on 22 November 1956. In 1968 the Westminster Bank and the National Provincial Bank announced their intention to merge. On 1 January 1970 the branch took the National Westminster Bank name until its closure, on 11 May 1973, due to the duplication of branches.

When the building was sold by the Waldron family in 2015, the keys to the huge bank vault had been lost and apparently it had to be cracked open.



Photo of No.68 c.1950s when it was the National Provincial - note its neighbour, No.70 High Street, one of the Marsh and Baxter's butcher shops, recently recreated at the Black Country Living Museum.





WALDRONS SOLICITORS

Records indicate that the firm occupied and/or owned at least part of No.68 from around the 1920s.

William Waldron, the founder, is first recorded as a solicitor in the 1871 census, aged 28. By 1896 he is recorded in Kelly's Directory also as a Commissioner for Oaths, operating from the High Street, opposite the old Police Station. He became the first Brierley Hill Urban District Council Clerk in 1894, going on to also be the Clerk for the Hospital Committee. When his son Edward joined the firm, it became 'William Waldron & Son'. The firm later operated from close to the old Town Hall before moving to No.68 by 1932.

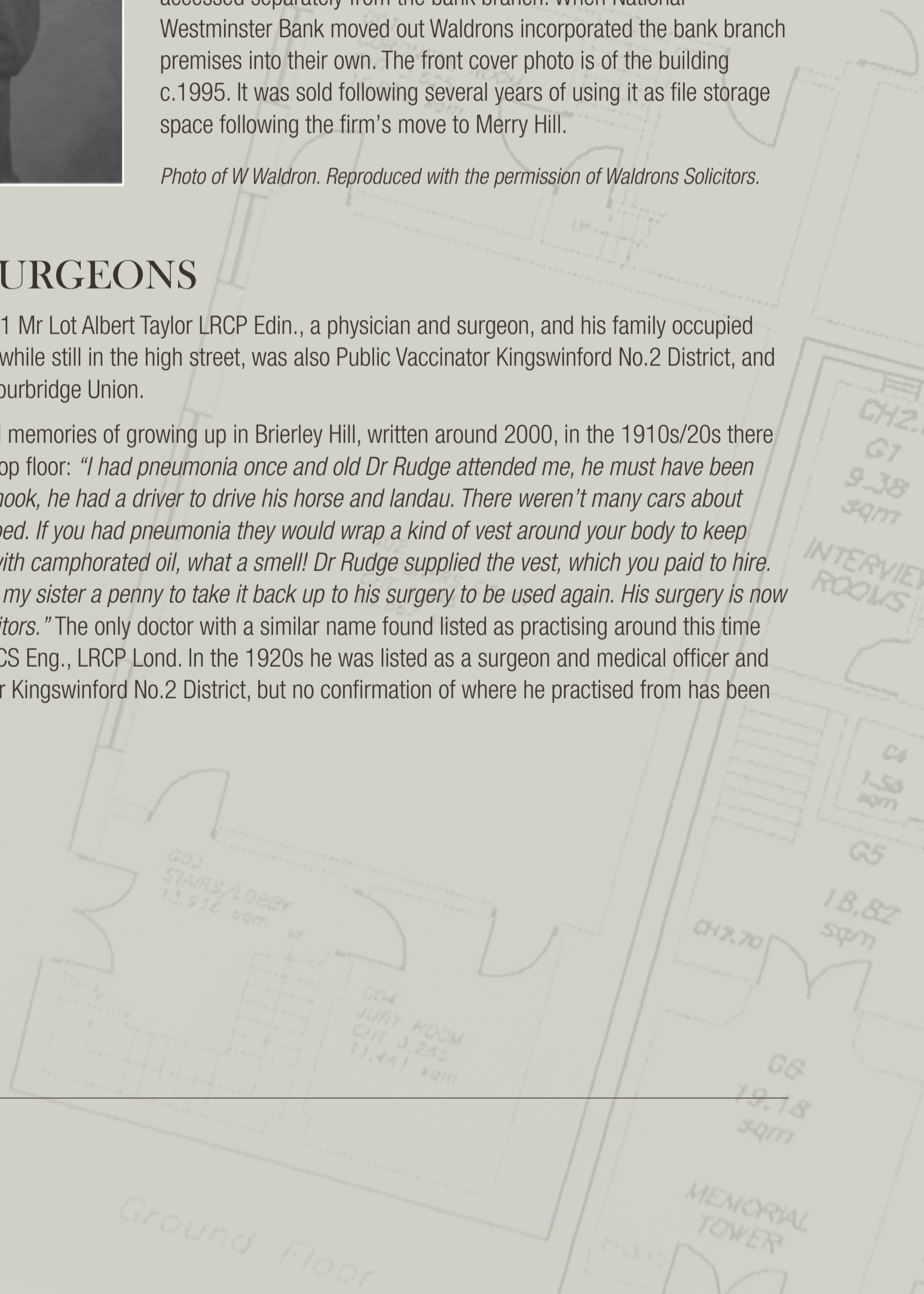
The firm operated at the back of the ground floor and upstairs, accessed separately from the bank branch. When National Westminster Bank moved out Waldrons incorporated the bank branch premises into their own. The front cover photo is of the building c.1995. It was sold following several years of using it as file storage space following the firm's move to Merry Hill.

Photo of W Waldron. Reproduced with the permission of Waldrons Solicitors.

PHYSICIANS/SURGEONS

According to the census in 1901 Mr Lot Albert Taylor LRCP Edin., a physician and surgeon, and his family occupied the building. In 1908 Dr Taylor, while still in the high street, was also Public Vaccinator Kingswinford No.2 District, and Medical Officer No.4 District Stourbridge Union.

In Joseph Garratt's self-penned memories of growing up in Brierley Hill, written around 2000, in the 1910s/20s there was a doctor's surgery on the top floor: *"I had pneumonia once and old Dr Rudge attended me, he must have been eighty at least and his hands shook, he had a driver to drive his horse and landau. There weren't many cars about as they were just being developed. If you had pneumonia they would wrap a kind of vest around your body to keep you warm, and rub your body with camphorated oil, what a smell! Dr Rudge supplied the vest, which you paid to hire. When I was well again he gave my sister a penny to take it back up to his surgery to be used again. His surgery is now occupied by Waldrons the solicitors."* The only doctor with a similar name found listed as practising around this time in Brierley Hill is a Dr Rudd MRCS Eng., LRCP Lond. In the 1920s he was listed as a surgeon and medical officer and in 1932 as Public Vaccinator for Kingswinford No.2 District, but no confirmation of where he practised from has been found.



BRIERLEY HILL HIGH STREET HERITAGE ACTION ZONE

In 2023, thanks to funding through the Brierley Hill High Street Heritage Action Zone, and from private investment from the new owners, Hayley and Paul Andrews, the exterior of No.68 was repaired and architectural features reinstated. Following the completion of the external works, in the same year Hayley and Paul invested further, undertaking the sympathetic repair and conversion of the interior into a residential use. This is one of a number of heritage buildings that the couple of have worked on in the borough. For further information about the High Street HAZ administered by Historic England and Dudley Council visit:

<https://www.dudley.gov.uk/residents/planning/historic-environment/brierley-hill-high-street-heritage-action-zone/>

Note

Buildings along the high street were re-numbered sometime between 1921 and 1932, when this building's address changed from being 125 High Street to No. 68. Only the current numbers have been used in this document.

Julie A Clarke, Brierley Hill High Street HAZ Heritage Volunteer

March 2024

Acknowledgments:

Ancestry.co.uk

Brierley Hill Community Forum

Dudley Historic Environment Record

Dudley Archives and Local History centre

How to Read Buildings by Carol D Cragoe

HSBC Bank Archives

Lloyds Bank Archives

National Library of Scotland

National Westminster Bank Archives

Stan Hill's Brierley Hill and Life by Stan Hill

<https://www.the-curates-line.com/joseph-garratt-1911.php>

The Buildings of England - Birmingham & The Black Country by Foster, Pevsner & Wedgwood

Wikipedia.com

