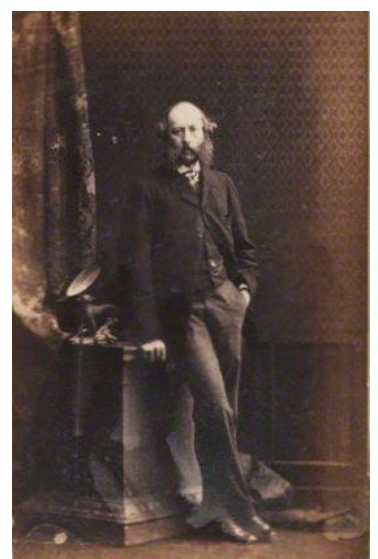


The people who own a house are of course not always the same as those that occupy it. The earliest details I found of both owner and occupier of Actons date from 1799 when a Richard Lake bought it and an Edward Bennett seems to have been occupying and possibly farming at Actons. HALS has a nice map plus some other documents.

Meanwhile John Clarke's highly recommended history of Gilston mentions the Plumer Ward family as important land owners in our area in the 18th and 19th century. Perhaps Richard Lake sold to the Plumer Wards.

The 1839 tithe map lists a Plummer Ward owning Actons, Pennys and other local estates. This must have been Robert Plumer or Plummer Ward*, 1765 – 1846, an English barrister, politician, and novelist. On Wikipedia it says that "his law books were as pleasant as his novels, and his novels as dull as law books." Richard Avis and his family lived at the house and must have done the farming. The Avis family were still in residence 11 years later at the time of the 1851 census. The Plummer Wards were followed by the Hodgsons and they in turn were followed by the Bowlbys. At the time of the 1901 and the 1911 census Actons was being lived in by Farquarson Greive and his family.



Robert Plummer Ward

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Richard Lake's coat of arms

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Edward Salwyn Bowlby

The first Mynott to come to Actons and High Wych was Wilfred Ernest born in 1900 in Great Sampford. He was the son of Ernest Mynott, born 1871 one of at least 11 children of William Mynott and his wife Sarah. Following in his father's footsteps William Mynott was a farmer, miller and beer retailer. The Mynott windmill stood on Lower Green Wimbish from around 1840. According to a story told by Edgar Mynott, an uncle or brother of Wilfred, it was once moved on rollers from one end of the Green to the other, a distance of some 180 yards. The Wimbish windmill was eventually demolished in 1912. Ernest had married Mary Smith at Saffron Walden in 1899. At the time of the 1901 census they plus Wilfred were living at Bush Farm Little Sampford with Mary's parents William and Phoebe Smith. Ten years later Ernest and Mary were living at Garrols Farm Broxted and had 6 children. Ernest was described as a Farm Bailiff. Wilfred married Amy Mulligan in 1924. Amy, who was also known as Annie, hailed from Dublin. The marriage was registered in Dunmow .

- Both spellings are in use

Wilfred and Annie had three children, twin boys Ernest Christopher Wilfred and Stanley John born on 30th January 1926. Stanley is registered as dying in the same quarter as his birth and is buried at Great Canfield. In 1932 Wilfred and Annie moved to High Wych and started farming at Actons and Great Pennys. They were of course tenant farmers. Most local land remained in the ownership of the Bowlby family. In the last week of 1938 a daughter was born: Sylvia, better known to most as Joy

Wilfred was a successful farmer in the thirties and forties using a lot of new technology. He was regarded as a capable but stubborn man. As he farmed over such a large area help was needed so there were a number of farmworkers on the payroll, some of them being housed in the cottages next to the farm. Life on the farm was of course never quiet. In the war years a number of prisoners of war worked at Actons. They were well appreciated and some of them even stayed in the UK after 1945.



The Mynott Mill in Wimbish - Nameplate at Actons

Yes, the best known of Wilfred's children was undoubtedly Ernest Christopher Wilfred, better known to all as Chris. Just as well known is Lilian Alice Pohl, Lily, born in Bow in the East End of London in 1923. In September 1940, during one of the first Blitz bombings, Lily, was bombed out of the house where she was born. King George VI and Winston Churchill came to see the crater. After a short spell staying with neighbours Lily and her mother then came to East Herts as evacuees. They found a small cottage in Eastwick to live in. Pretty though it was it had no facilities at all: no water, no light and only a toilet half way down the garden. "I tried to find work on the land" Lily says, "but Mr. Carter said he did not want any land girls. He was later to have a girl who also came from Bow and went to the same school as me".

"I went back to London to see my friends at the bespoke tailoring company I worked for and my boss said 'Why don't you try coming back'. I agreed and then had to catch the 7.15 train every morning to be in London by 8. The fare was 1/6p. I did this every work day until late summer 1943. Now, when girls were 21 years old you were called up unless you were married or failed a medical. I went to County Hall for mine. After being enrolled I had to see Mrs. Wentworth Stanley in High Wych. That was the first time I went there. I worked at Bakers Farm dairy. That job completely changed my outlook; from a strange London person I suddenly turned into a welcome visitor. There was just no better way to get to know everybody in the area!"

On New Year's day 1944, Chris Mynott came in for some milk; their house cow had gone dry. "I told him to wait until Mr. Brown, my boss, came home. Milk is always short in winter. That was our first meeting. When my colleague Winnie left I took over her round using a horse and cart. I went from High Wych to Eastwick, back down to Burnt Mill Lane, crossing up to Netteswell, then back to Gilston and up Penny's Hill to the farm. I never went to Actons. We only had one half day off which was Sunday. How I looked forward to it."

Lilly and Chris's friendship quickly blossomed into romance. They got married on 3th November 1949 and moved into the house at Great Pennys Farm



Wilfred M. with brothers Freddy and Stanley – The Eastwick Cottage where Lily initially lived - Chris Mynott with Italian POWs –

Anthony, their first child was born in 1950. Lily remembers how Nurse Cohen delivered him by the light of an oil lamp. In the years that followed three more children were born: Christopher in 1951, Jane in 1954 and finally Nick in 1961.



1947 Chris M on his McCormack tractor – 1974 Lily and Chris

In the fifties and sixties Chris took over more and more tasks from father Wilfred who by 1965 was more or less retired and had moved to Hunsdon. By 1969 Chris, Lily and the children had moved into the farmhouse at Actons. Lily, who had not liked the house at Great Pennys very much, really loved the Actons Farmhouse.

In December 1970 Alice Pohl, Lily's mother, passed away. Hardly a month later, on 6th January 1971 tragedy struck again. Together with a friend Anthony had gone to France to pick up a mutual acquaintance. On the way back whilst driving through the Champagne region they had an accident. Anthony, who had been asleep in the back of the van was crushed and broke his back. He was brought to a hospital in Epernay where he spent 3 weeks being treated by the doctors there. Lily came out to France to be near her son. She stayed with him for that entire period and is still full of praise for the people she met there. "One friend I met, Francoise, I am still in touch with". Eventually Anthony was brought back to England where, at the spinal recovery unit at Stoke Mandeville Hospital, he spent a further 5 months in recovery. It was clear he had to spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair.

Father Chris once again took up some of the duties he had already delegated to Anthony. Brother Christopher, who was at agricultural college then, spent a lot of time adapting various pieces of farm machinery so that tractors, combine harvesters etc. could all be used by a paraplegic. Above all Anthony himself, with tremendous willpower, set about reorganizing his life as a young farmer. Slowly but surely he took on more tasks. In the eighties and early nineties it was Anthony that became the central figure at Actons Farm. His health however slowly deteriorated



Anthony Mynott, in a seventies passport picture - 1994 – Anthony M. with the daughter of a friend.

The way the land was worked had meanwhile changed rapidly and radically. The olden days when the Lord of the Manor looked on benevolently whilst tenants toiled the land were definitely over. Farming had become an industry. By 1948 Arthur Salvin Bowlby had already sold most of his land to the IVEAGH trust controlled by the Guinness family. In 1979 that land, comprising not only Actons but a number of other farms as well, was sold on to the BP pension fund. They then sold it again until today when it is owned by "Places for People". Agricultural work is "farmed out" to contractors one of which nowadays is Nick Mynott! These developments it could be said are indicative of our present situation with regard to the land. Where initially investors in local land saw this as a long term project, as time went on landowners started to think more short term. This process continues today when the usage of agricultural land for building purposes has become acceptable if not commonplace. Your High Wych historian notes that the aforementioned Places for People is the main commercial organization pushing for the cynically named "Gilston Garden Project".



Lily Mynott in front of Actons in 2012 - Lily Mynott today

Wilfred passed away in 1980, Annie in 1988. Anthony who had moved into Wilfred's house in Hunsdon, died in 1998 and is buried in St. James's church yard together with his grandmother. Lily's husband Christopher passed away on new year's eve in 2001. Nowadays Lily and her son Christopher Jr. live at the Actons farm house whilst Nick with his family live at the refurbished farm cottages. Nick is active as a contract farmer. Lily remains the heart and soul of the family.

Sources for this article were Lily, Christopher and Nick Mynott, Jane Webb, Kenneth Farries' Essex Windmills and Mill Wrights, Wikipedia, Ancestry.co.uk and as always, Hertfordshire Archives and Library Services. We still need your personal contributions, memories, stories and photographs as well as your criticism, positive or negative. E-mail me at theo@vandebilt.co.uk or phone 01279 725468.