

“OAKHURST” – THE CHANGING FORTUNES OF A FAMILY HOME

By Christine Lea

More feet have crossed the threshold of “Oakhurst”, the largest house in Anchorage Road, Sutton Coldfield, in its 100 years of existence than any other property in the road.

Built in 1897, Oakhurst is a red-brick late Victorian dwelling originally set in 6¼ acres of terraced gardens in a highly desirable residential part of the town. There are still many noteworthy houses in the vicinity designed by well-known local architects who flourished in and around Birmingham at that time. In 1992 Anchorage Road and environs was designated the ‘Anchorage Road Conservation Area’.

Anchorage Road came into being in 1870. In two years four new homes were built on land sold by R. H. Sadler, a local solicitor who lived in the High Street. Richard Sadler placed certain restrictions on the types of houses to be built: for example, ‘that no houses should cost and be of value of less than £500’. Sixteen years passed with five more houses being built in 1888.¹ Eight years later, in 1896, Mr George E. Lowe, a business man from Burton-on-Trent appointed William Jenkins, Architect & Surveyor of 34 Bennetts Hill, Birmingham to design what was to be the largest house in Anchorage Road.

Building plans for Oakhurst were deposited with Sutton Borough Council on 30 March 1896. (Appendix A: “Oakhurst” – Building Plan 1896). The house was built a year later in 1897 by William Lee & Son of Avenue Road, Aston Manor. Designed as a three-storey dwelling Oakhurst had sixteen rooms and five cellars, and inside was decorated with oak panelling said to have come from the Great Exhibition of 1851 at the Crystal Palace.² Entry No. 653 of the Rate Book for 1897 shows Oakhurst having a rateable value of £93.10 – the highest at that time in Anchorage Road. Although a spacious house, it has to be said that Oakhurst is probably one of the less architecturally important dwellings in the road. Of note, however, is the frontage, having a line of fine Turkey Oaks that gives Oakhurst its name.



“Oakhurst” Front Entrance in 2014

George E. Lowe and family make their appearance in the 1891 Census. Born in 1852 the census lists George E. Lowe, aged 39, living at 7 Derby Road, Burton-on-Trent. His occupation is given as a ‘meat salesman’. George is married to Clara C. Lowe, aged 35, born c.1856 in

Erdington. The 1891 Census also lists an adopted daughter, Lizzie Yapp aged five, and named as a 'scholar'. The family has two general servants.

Ten years on the 1901 Census shows George E. Lowe growing in prosperity. He and his family are now living at his newly built house, "Oakhurst" in Anchorage Road. He is 49 years old and listed as a 'butcher/foreign meat salesman'. Clara, his wife is now 45, but the adopted daughter, Lizzie Yapp, no longer appears on the census. The household has a newcomer, Mary J. Buckley, described as a 'visitor' and as 'living on own means'. There are five servants in the household, one of whom, Amelia Hartley, aged 31, is described as a 'hospital nurse'.

The 1911 Census shows significant changes in the Lowe household. George E. Lowe is now a person of some standing in the community. Aged 59, he is named as a 'Managing Director' of a meat company and an employer. Clara is no longer listed, (her death certificate records that she died in the June quarter 1901). Perhaps the hospital nurse listed in the 1901 Census was there to take care of Clara? (A more detailed picture of the Lowe family and household is to be the subject of future research, where it is hoped all will be revealed.)

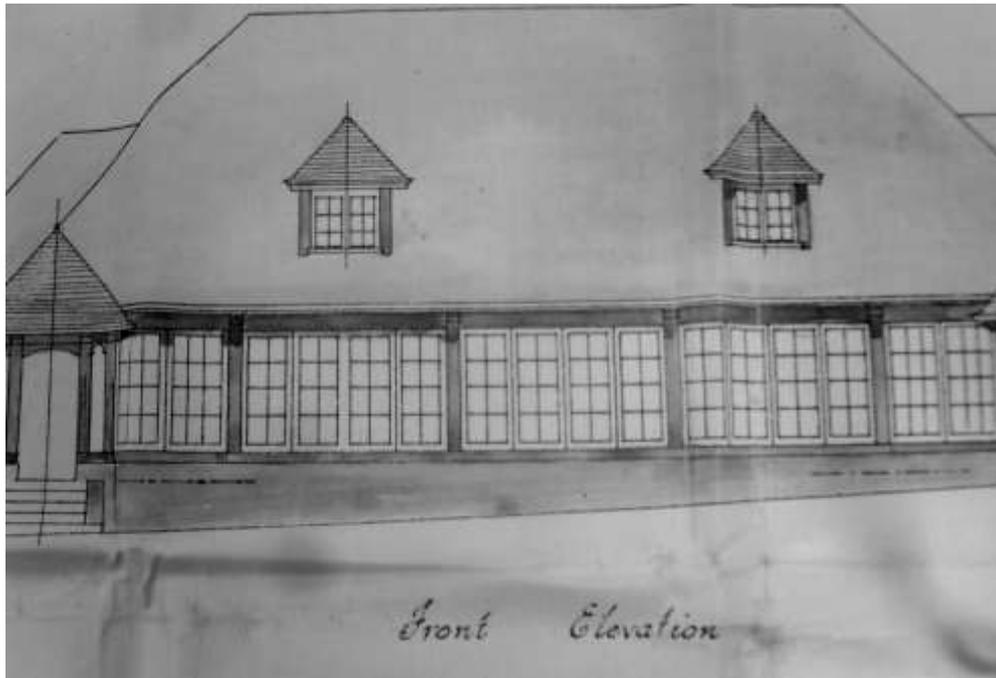
George E. Lowe has re-married. His second wife is Florence Marianne Lowe, aged 45, born in Greenwich, Kent and they have been married for six years. There are no children listed and it seems that the Lowes remained childless. In the household is Annie Beatrice Clemence, twenty years old and described as a 'visitor' and occupation as 'companion and domestic help'. There are four other servants in the household.

George and Florence Lowe took an active part in the community. They regularly attended the Wesleyan Methodist Church on The Parade; built 1887-1888. (In 1937 this building became Sutton Coldfield's first Public Library; a new Methodist Chapel being built in South Parade c.1935.) The Lowes were generous supporters of their church and when the extensions were built in 1908 to Four Oaks Methodist Church they made a donation of £3,000, even then a considerable sum of money. Florence Lowe became a local councillor, serving from the 1920s on the Maternity & Child Care Committee and in 1927 was co-opted onto the Further Education Sub-Committee. Altogether she served as a Borough Councillor up to 1937.

In 1927, at the age of 75 George E. Lowe died. Shortly afterwards in 1928 Florence Lowe built a wooden House of Friendship in the grounds of Oakhurst (described on the Building Plan as a 'Garden Shed') for the benefit of the local community. Amongst many activities the House of Friendship was used as a theatre, dance hall and assembly room. Mrs Lowe devoted much of her time in carrying out good works and entertaining children in the area and local children were invited to play in the grounds and she showered gifts on the children at Christmas and gave parties in the house.³

In February 1934, Florence Lowe, at the age of 68, made a magnificent gesture offering Oakhurst as a gift to the Borough Council. She wrote a letter to the Mayor, Councillor A. E. Terry, JP, which was read out at the Quarterly Meeting of the Council on Wednesday 7 February 1934. Mrs Lowe was present at the meeting. In her letter she says:

It was the hope often expressed by my late husband that Oakhurst be used after my death for some useful public service. Since 1927, when he died, the grounds have been improved, and the 'House of Friendship' was built. The land is freehold... [and Oakhurst is in a] position in the town where an open space should be increasingly valuable in the days to come.



House of Friendship – Front Elevation (Building Plan Register, 1928, No. 5031)

Mrs Lowe continues:

I have made up my mind to offer it first as a free gift to the Corporation of Sutton Coldfield to be used by the Council for what is in their opinion the greatest need of the town if suited to meet that need.

In Minute 564 of the meeting it is recorded:

“That this Council do place on record their appreciation of the very generous offer made by Councillor Mrs Lowe of ‘Oak Hurst’ and grounds, and accept the gift on behalf of the Town with sincere gratitude”.

Florence Lowe attached some conditions to her gift of Oakhurst which she made known to her solicitor. She asked that she keep two self-contained flats in the house for her own use and in another condition she says:

I would not want alcoholic beverage sold or served there, and I should wish that if ever the land or buildings were sold, the money should go into a fund of some sort for providing scholarships.⁴

Not everyone viewed Mrs Lowe’s gift of Oakhurst to the Council with joy. Residents of Anchorage Road and Mulroy Road strongly objected to some of the conditions attached to Mrs Lowe’s gift, in particular that the building be used as public library, which they felt ignored the original restrictions placed on the dwellings being built in Anchorage Road.

In a letter to the Borough Council, dated 27 March 1934, residents of Anchorage Road and Mulroy Road expressed their views, saying:

...we are not opposed to a public free library in Sutton Coldfield, and many of us are in favour of such provision, but we venture the opinion that Oakhurst House is unsuitable for the purpose

primarily having regard to its situation, and secondly on account of its design and construction...Anchorage Road is completely developed by private residences, and we believe the whole of the land in that road is restricted to that purpose only, so that the use of the house as a public building would be a breach of such restriction.

And going on to say:

...we are very much perturbed as to the use to which the grounds of Oakhurst may be put. It has recently come to our knowledge that Mrs Councillor Lowe has made arrangements, and had actually all but commenced to construct a tea hall 70 feet long on the land near to the House of Friendship at the rear of residences in Mulroy Road. Exception to such a building was taken at the instance of one of the residents. The erection has been postponed; but no undertaking has been given that it will not proceed with, and a request that it should not be proceeded with without due notice to the residents in question has been refused...

(Appendix B: “Mrs Florence Lowe’s gift of Oakhurst to the Borough Council in 1934 and the protest from local residents”)

At the Council Meeting of 2 May 1934, with Mrs Lowe present, the protest letter from the residents of Anchorage Road and Mulroy Road was read out to the General Purposes Committee:

“Your Committee report they have carefully considered the memorial and resolutions in respect of the user of the property known as Oak Hurst, Anchorage Road which was received from owners and residents in the vicinity and referred to your Committee to consider and report.

“They [the residents] were present at a meeting convened by the Mayor of persons interested as owners and held in the Council Chamber on the 17th April and heard the views put forward on behalf of the memorialists.

“Your Committee however are of opinion that acceptance of the gift should be adhered to and that steps should be taken if necessary for the removal or modification of the restrictive covenant affecting the land.

“Your Committee consider that it will be to the interest of the general community that the house and grounds should be conveyed to the Corporation and that their future use should be controlled by the Borough Council”.

The residents of Anchorage Road and Mulroy Road didn’t give up. The battle over Mrs Lowe’s gift of Oakhurst carried on throughout 1934 and 1935. The residents arguing that they were: *Satisfied the use of Oakhurst House as a library, or any other public building, would be destructive of the amenities of the district, and will use its power and influence to oppose such use.*

People power won the day. Reluctantly the Council was forced to reject Mrs Lowe’s gift. The monthly meeting of the Borough Council, Wednesday 1 January 1936 proved to be a red-letter day for the residents of Anchorage Road and Mulroy Road. They maintained that Anchorage Road was restricted to being developed as private residences, and any other use would be a breach of such restrictions. It seems that the conditions placed in 1870 by Richard Sadler on the use of dwellings in Anchorage Road still held good.

Mrs Lowe decided to cut her losses, selling Oakhurst and its grounds to Councillor W. A. Perry (Mayor from 1935 to 1937), for £5,000. Councillor Perry owned the property for one year only, selling it in turn in 1938 to the Borough Council for the same price that he paid Mrs Lowe. In 1937 Mrs Lowe decided to withdraw from the fray. She resigned from the Borough Council and moved to Surrey, where she passed away many years later in 1964.

The Borough Council seems to have had no problem about buying Oakhurst from Councillor Perry. The General Purposes Committee, 21 November 1938 records that :

“...the Committee considered the generous offer of Cllr Perry to sell Oakhurst to the Corporation at the price paid by him plus the expenses which he had incurred in connection with the same”.

And that:

“... the premises and land known as Oak Hurst, Anchorage Road Sutton Coldfield be purchased under the provisions of sec.59 of the Sutton Coldfield Corporation Act 1938 at the price of £5,000 plus all expenses, and that application be made to the Ministry of Health for consent to borrow the sum of £5,500”.

In February 1939 the Borough Council was given consent by the Minister of Health to raise a loan for the purchase of Oakhurst. At a meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 20 March 1939 the committee reported:

“...Negotiations for the purchase of the premises and land known as ‘Oak Hurst’, Anchorage Road, have now been completed and the property will now be transferred to the control of the Park and Estates Committee”.

The Parks & Estates Committee got on with their job and appointed Mr & Mrs Ernest Edward Palmer of 37 Four Oaks Road as caretakers, at a joint salary of £156 per annum, plus living accommodation, lighting and heating and subject to their serving a satisfactory probationary period of six months. Notices were put out informing the public that the grounds of Oakhurst would be open daily from 10am to 8.30pm. Dogs were not allowed in the grounds. A Sub-Committee consisting of the Chairman, the Mayor, Councillors Terry and Perry was given executive power to consider a scale of fees for the use of the hard tennis court and the hiring of the House of Friendship and grounds for garden parties.

The Borough Council wasted no time in moving into Oakhurst. Needing space for more accommodation in the Council House, and intended as a temporary measure, the Education Department was transferred to Oakhurst, taking over the whole of the first floor.

With the outbreak of war in 1939 Oakhurst, the House of Friendship and the grounds were all put to good use. The Borough Council placed the basement of Oakhurst at the disposal of the Air Raid Precautions Committee for lectures and meetings, and the Women’s Voluntary Services also occupied the building operating a Clothing Exchange Depot. (In 1946 after the war ended the WVS Clothing Depot moved out of Oakhurst to the Hut at the rear of the Slipper Baths in South Parade, with the baths later becoming the home of Sutton Arts Theatre in 1951.)⁵

Other local organisations made use of Oakhurst and the House of Friendship, including the Sutton Coldfield Battalion Home Guard, the Army Cadet Force, the Red Cross, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides and Sutton Arts Theatre. Parts of the grounds were turned over to allotments. When the Army Cadet Force, however, applied to the Borough Council to use the basement of Oakhurst for band practice it was roundly refused. No doubt the Council were well aware that there was a limit to the amount of noise that the neighbours would tolerate.



*Sutton Coldfield News 17 June 1944 - advert for a wartime event at Oakhurst*⁶

Oakhurst also became the centre for the wartime Book Drive Campaign set up by the Ministry of Supply. A letter dated 17 July 1945 from the Campaign Officer at the Ministry in London congratulated the Borough Education Department for reaching a target of 84,000 books and magazines.

Soon after the war ended the Borough Surveyor was given the job of drawing up a plan for leasing some of the land at Oakhurst and selling off other parts. Talk was of a maternity home being established at Oakhurst. The Minutes of the Park & Estates Committee for 22 October 1945 record:

“That the piece of land edged pink shown on the plan produced, be offered to a Committee of persons to be approved by the Corporation who desire to establish a Maternity Home at a rental of £250 per annum for a term of 7 years...”

Midwifery and Child Care services were available in the Borough to meet government legislation, but nursing home provision was very limited. Before the war Sutton Borough Council had approved plans for a Maternity and Child Welfare Centre – urgently needed – but war intervened and the project came to a halt. The *Sutton Coldfield News* 1 July 1944 reported Councillor Mrs Garrard saying at a recent meeting of the Maternity & Child Welfare Committee that “the Committee were exploring all avenues to ascertain whether it was possible to open such a home [Municipal Maternity Home] in Sutton”. There were private nursing homes in the town but many women could not afford them. Expectant mothers needing hospital deliveries had to go as far as Solihull and Nuneaton to have their babies.⁷

Turning Oakhurst into a Maternity Home was a landmark event in the town. A brochure advertising the new maternity home states that ‘the venture was the brainchild of a small band of public-spirited citizens in the town who set about the task of raising funds for the provision of this much needed service in Sutton’.

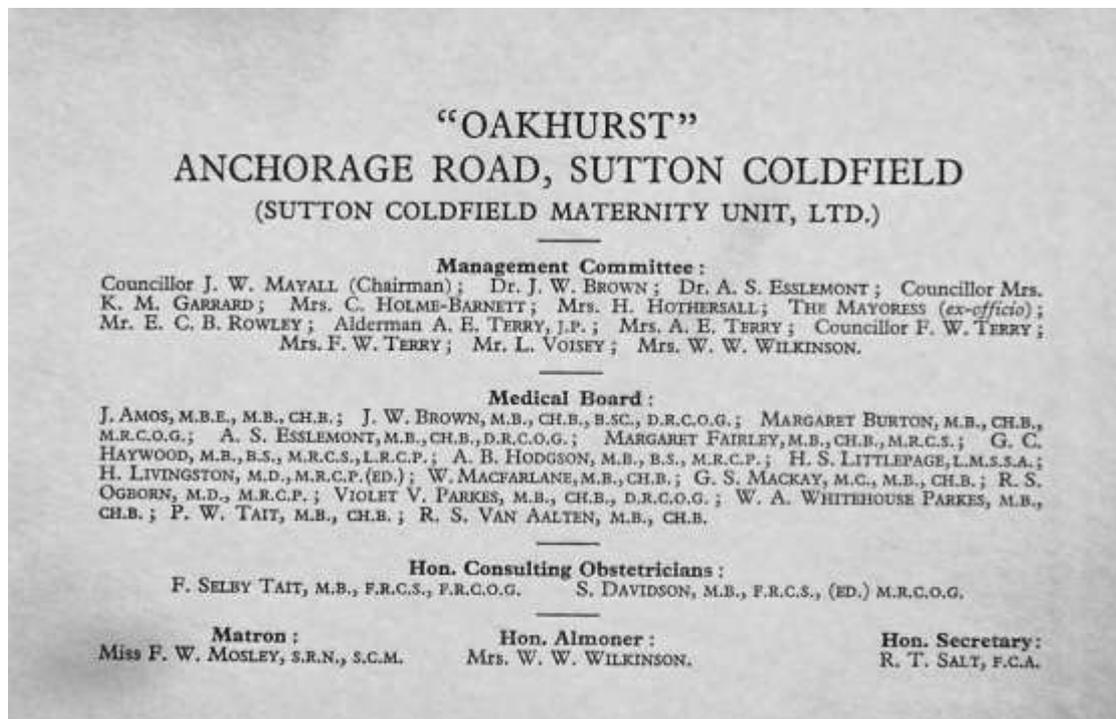
On the 1 July 1946 the ‘**Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit, Ltd**’ was born. There was no liquid capital available for the venture and the cost of adapting and equipping Oakhurst was estimated at £10,000. A ‘Mayor’s Appeal’ was launched, successfully raising £8,000 for the project. Financial help also came from Sir Peter Bennett, MP for Edgbaston and JP for Sutton Coldfield and Lady Bennett, who generously purchased and donated 22 Anchorage Road, next door to Oakhurst, for use as accommodation as a Nurses Home.

The Maternity Unit quickly got off the ground. A lease of Oakhurst was granted by the Town Clerk, to be renewed every seven years. And, at the meeting of the Park & Estates Committee for 4 March 1946 the Borough Surveyor approved the plan to convert the premises into a Maternity Home with the Health & Housing Committee on 4 July 1946 giving approval for Oakhurst to be used as a ‘Nursing Home’.

A clear statement of the status of the new maternity home was made at the General Purposes Committee on 31 July, 1946:

“Min. 1960 - Oak Hurst Anchorage Road

The solicitors to the proposed Company have applied for registration of the Company under the name of *Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit Limited*. The Council are aware that the new company is being formed by individuals and has no connection whatever with the Sutton Coldfield Corporation”.



Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit, Ltd – Management Committee and Medical Board c.1947

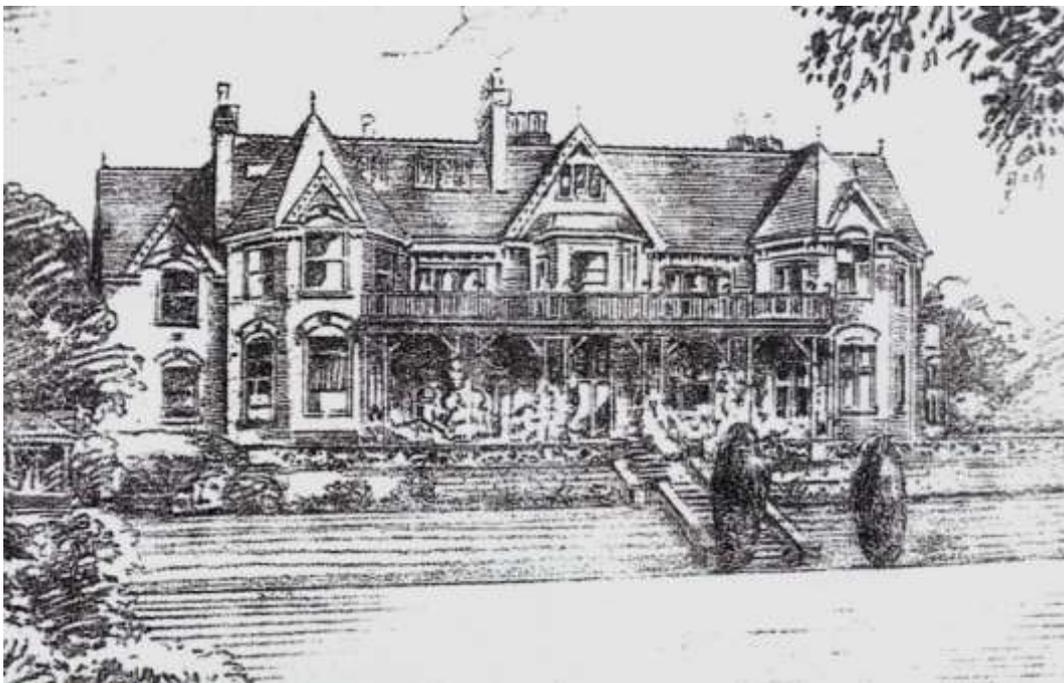
The new maternity unit was registered as a “Limited Liability Company”, therefore having a policy of not distributing dividends to shareholders or paying directors. There were fourteen beds in four wards and separate labour wards and nurseries. Well-known medical practitioners served on the Medical Board and eminent obstetricians connected with Birmingham Medical School acted as Honorary Consultants. It was the aim of the Management Committee to work closely with local medical practitioners. The brochure for the Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit, Ltd proudly announced:

*Oakhurst is unique...it is neither a Private Nursing Home nor a Public Hospital – it is a thoroughly up-to-date comfortable Maternity Home... and It may be several years before the [NHS] can provide this service in Sutton Coldfield.*⁸

Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit, Ltd flourished. When the unit was first set up a charge of £14.14.0d was made for each confinement. Within the first two years 400 babies were born at Oakhurst. In June 1947 the Unit was given permission by the Borough Council to use the House of Friendship one afternoon a week as an ante-natal clinic at an inclusive charge of 5/- a week, with the Unit taking full responsibility for the medical fees and running of the clinic.⁹ More services followed. At the General Purposes Committee on 13 Feb 1949 it was recorded that :

“The Town Clerk in correspondence with the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board reported the Unit have agreed to accept NHS patients...and immediate steps are being taken for such patients to be accommodated at “Oak Hurst”.

Meanwhile the Birmingham Hospital Regional Board was taking an interest in purchasing Oakhurst for its own expansionist plans. Approval for this was needed from the Minister of Health. In 1953 with deliberations still ongoing the Borough Council gave the Birmingham Hospital Regional Board consent to lease for a period of two years part of the Maternity Unit as an Ophthalmic Screening Unit.¹⁰



Sketch of the rear view of Oakhurst showing the terraced gardens c.1920

At the General Purposes Committee on 20 October 1953 the Town Clerk reported that the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board had received an application from the British Red Cross Society to use the Out-Patients Dept at Oakhurst Maternity Home during the evening for lectures and practical work. The Committee agreed that the Red Cross could use the premises once a fortnight on payment of a nominal rent.

Two years later, in 1955, the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board had to inform the Town Clerk that the Minister of Health was not prepared to agree to the purchase of Oakhurst at present and the Board suggested instead that a lease should be granted to the Board for a further period of seven years. The Borough Council rejected the request and said that the lease to the Minister of Health should be terminated.

All this time the Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit, Ltd was providing an excellent service to patients. But time was marching on. At a meeting of the Borough Council on 11 March 1958 the Health Committee reported that the Ministry of Health was aware that there were only 14 maternity beds in Sutton serving a population of 56,000. It was clear that more maternity beds were sorely needed. Meanwhile, during the 1950s and 1960s Good Hope Hospital was expanding rapidly and providing new services under the NHS.

The demise of the Maternity Unit at Oakhurst came on 24th October 1967 when the Fothergill Unit, a new purpose built seven-storey block providing 144 maternity beds was opened at Good Hope Hospital.¹¹ After twenty-one years Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit, Ltd had come to the end of its useful life, closing its doors to patients on the 3 July 1967. The Unit had done sterling work. From 1946 to 1967 it is estimated that over 5,000 babies had been safely born at the Unit and that 5,000 bundles with 5,000 pairs of tiny feet had been carried out over the threshold of Oakhurst by proud parents into the big wide world.

Oakhurst now stood empty. Sutton Coldfield Borough Council assumed full responsibility for the house and grounds once more.

Almost immediately, the Birmingham Regional Hospital Board took the opportunity to ask the Borough Council if it would allow Oakhurst to be used as residential accommodation for pupil midwives. But the Council rejected the request, at the same time terminating the lease to the Minister of Health from 30 September 1967.¹²

The imminent closure of the Sutton Coldfield Maternity Unit, Ltd had been broadcast in the *Sutton Coldfield News* way back in February 1967 when it was reported that the Maternity Unit at Oakhurst was about to become redundant and the future use of the premises was uncertain. A spokesman for the Borough Council told the newspaper: “Unfortunately the property has certain covenants restricting its use, and we shall have to sort the legal side before our thoughts turn to planning the future. It is likely that we shall have to go to the Lands Tribunal before the questions of the covenants can be cleared up”.

Oakhurst didn't stay empty for long. In September 1967 the Parks & Estates Committee applied to Warwickshire County Council for a change of use of Oakhurst from Maternity Hospital to temporary office accommodation for the Borough Surveyor's Department and also the Housing Manager's Department, for a period of 10 years, which was approved. The cost of the alterations was estimated at £12,000 and work began immediately and was completed by May 1968. At the same time the Borough Council offered the House of Friendship to Warwickshire County Council as temporary accommodation for an Adult Mental Health Training Centre to replace accommodation used at St Nicholas [Upper Clifton Road]. In the event Warwickshire County Council decided to decline the offer.¹³

Seemingly the question of covenants on the land surrounding Oakhurst was sorted out with the Lands Tribunal. At a meeting of the Parks & Estates Committee on 8 July 1968 plans were being made about the future development of several acres of land at the rear of Oakhurst as

comprehensive residential development. The Town Planning Committee gave outline approval for the scheme. Objections to the proposed development came from local residents in nearby Mulroy Road. They did not like the plans to erect 64 houses with roads and drainage works at the rear of numbers 26 to 54 Anchorage Road and the Borough Surveyor was forced to submit an alternative layout for the site.¹⁴ Despite this delay land was sold by the Borough Council to Bryant Homes Ltd who at that time owned number 40 Anchorage Road. But the Council also had to take into consideration that land at the rear of Oakhurst might be needed for a proposed relief road scheme around the centre of Sutton. A decision about the route of the relief road dragged on until 1971 when the route was at last decided and the land surrounding Oakhurst came up for sale for residential development again.

The Borough Council's Civic Amenities Committee had been having discussions with Bryant Homes Ltd and George Stubbings Ltd who had both previously been granted individual planning permissions for the residential development of the land, and who now submitted a joint scheme. Bryant Homes Ltd already owned adjoining land, which gave access to the site. At the Civic Amenities Committee on 23 November 1971 the Committee considered a request from the developers that the Council enter into a covenant not to permit any obstructions on a small triangular piece of land at the front of Oakhurst, which adjoined the proposed service road to the proposed residential development. It was a requirement of the planning consent that a suitable visibility splay be provided over the land in question. The work would entail the reduction in height of the existing retaining wall, which the developers were prepared to do at their own expense. The Council agreed and the building of the Rockingham Gardens Estate went ahead on the acres once belonging to and surrounding Oakhurst.

Oakhurst next made news on the night of the 3 August 1972 when a fire broke out and damaged the central portion of the building. Although the damage was considerable the Borough Surveyor's Department stayed working in the building the whole time restoration work was being carried out.

The Local Government Act of 1972 brought major changes to local government throughout England and Wales. In 1974 many local councils up and down the country were abolished. The eighty-eight year old Borough of Sutton Coldfield ceased to exist and Sutton Coldfield was now governed by the City of Birmingham. Oakhurst became the property of Birmingham City Council.

For a time the City Council used Oakhurst as offices for the City Planning Department but by 1977 all the old Borough Council offices were centralised and once again Oakhurst stood empty and apparently unloved.¹⁵ In the *Birmingham Evening Mail* for 19.12.77 there was a report that vandals had caused extensive damage to the house since May when it had been boarded up and that £50,000 was to be spent on cleaning up the damage.

Better news came at the end of 1977 when the City Council was reported to be offering Oakhurst on a 25 year lease to a company as a private nursing home. Mr Brian Riley, Managing Director of the company is quoted as saying "I see the nursing home as a first class hotel with built in medical facilities".¹⁶ By 1980 the scheme had come to nothing and was followed by the alarming news that Birmingham City Council was planning to demolish Oakhurst. The *Sutton Coldfield News* for 4.1.80 declared:
...that Oakhurst could be demolished and replaced by a new three-storey block of flats set in 1.2 acres of land.

Two years later in 1982 it was reported in the press that:

*...residents in Rockingham Gardens and Rushmoor Close have already sent petitions to the Planning Committee saying they wish to be kept fully informed of the proposals and developments and they would not necessarily object to a private residential development.*¹⁷

There was also a report in the *Birmingham Evening Mail* for 12 5. 81 that Asher Investments Limited of Birmingham wanted to convert Oakhurst into a hotel and conference centre, with public bars and restaurant and 60 parking places. Residents objected saying “they would suffer noise and smell and that the development would be too intensive and out of character in the residential road”. The scheme was turned down by the City Planners.

Events took a happier turn for Oakhurst when in 1983 the Waterloo Housing Association Ltd, a local company based at Ryland House, Boldmere, stepped in saving Oakhurst from the bulldozer. The Waterloo Housing Association, a non-profit making organisation, managed by a voluntary committee, bought Oakhurst from Birmingham City Council for £100,000 and gave the house a £200,000 facelift. Luckily for Oakhurst the company deliberately chose not to alter the structure or character of the house and made sure of keeping many of its original features.

In 1982, the City Engineers took photographs of the interior of Oakhurst prior to the Waterloo Housing Association’s conversion of Oakhurst into apartments. The photographs show fine panelling, a handsome fireplace, intricate ceiling work and well-proportioned windows.¹⁸



*Waterloo Housing Association advertisement – Sutton Times 10.5.1984*¹⁹

The Waterloo Housing Association gave priority to first-time buyers and those who needed to live in Sutton because of family or local businesses, and fixed the purchase price accordingly. The house was divided up into six flats on the ground floor, six on the first floor and two on the second floor, which had extensive views over Sutton Park.

The remaining land around the house was landscaped but it is not clear when the House of Friendship was demolished. The last recorded use of the House of Friendship in the Borough Council Minutes is in 1968 when the building was offered to Warwickshire County Council as

accommodation for an Adult Mental Health Training Centre. It seems most likely that the House of Friendship was demolished when land surrounding Oakhurst was sold to Stubbings and Bryant in 1971 for the Rockingham Gardens Development.

Happily, not all has changed at Oakhurst. In 1980 the Sutton Coldfield Civic Society applied to Birmingham City Council Leisure Services for a blanket preservation order (TPO) on all the trees on the site, ensuring that the line of Turkey Oaks on the frontage is kept for posterity. Oakhurst's name and identity stays alive and well.²⁰



Oakhurst in 2014

Appendices

Appendix A: "Oakhurst" Building Plan 1896

(Sutton Coldfield Building Plan Register. Vol.2 (1894-1898) app. no. 421)

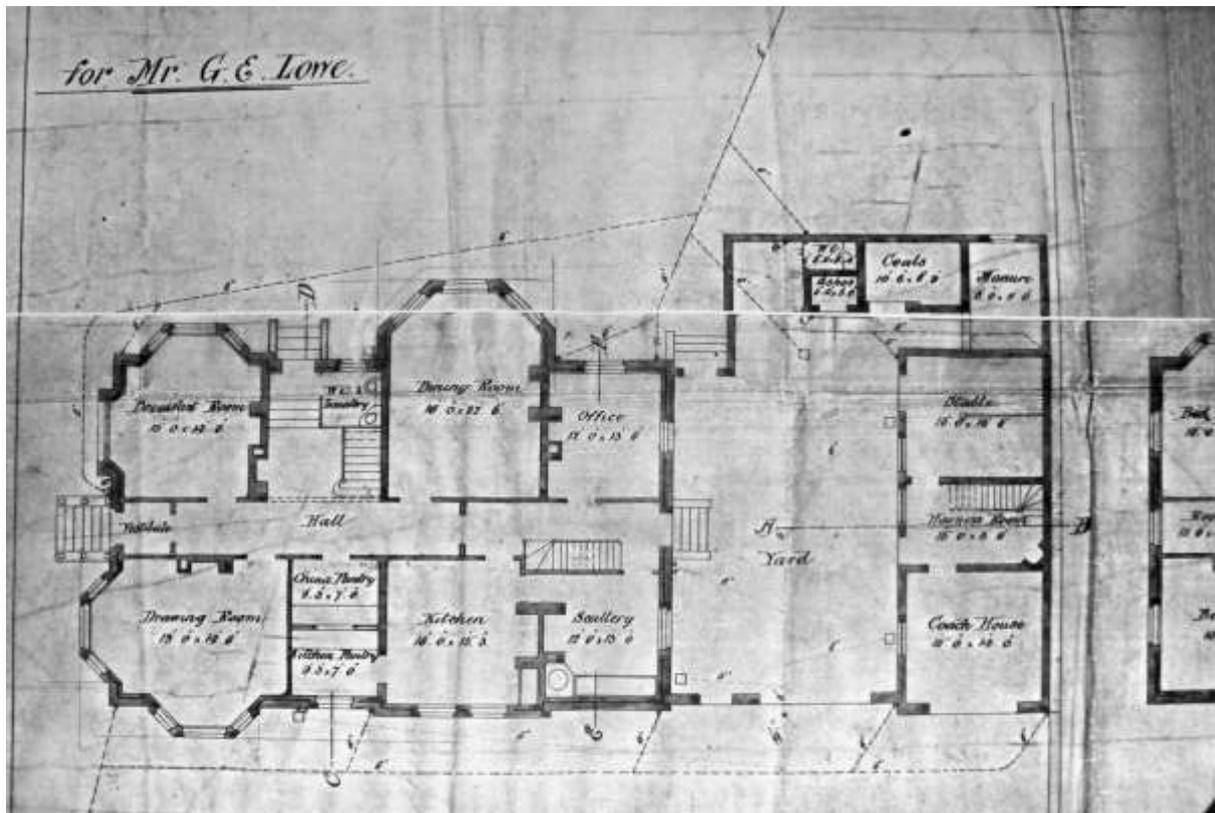
Design for Residence, Outbuildings & Premises

Anchorage Road, Sutton Coldfield for Mr. G. E. Lowe

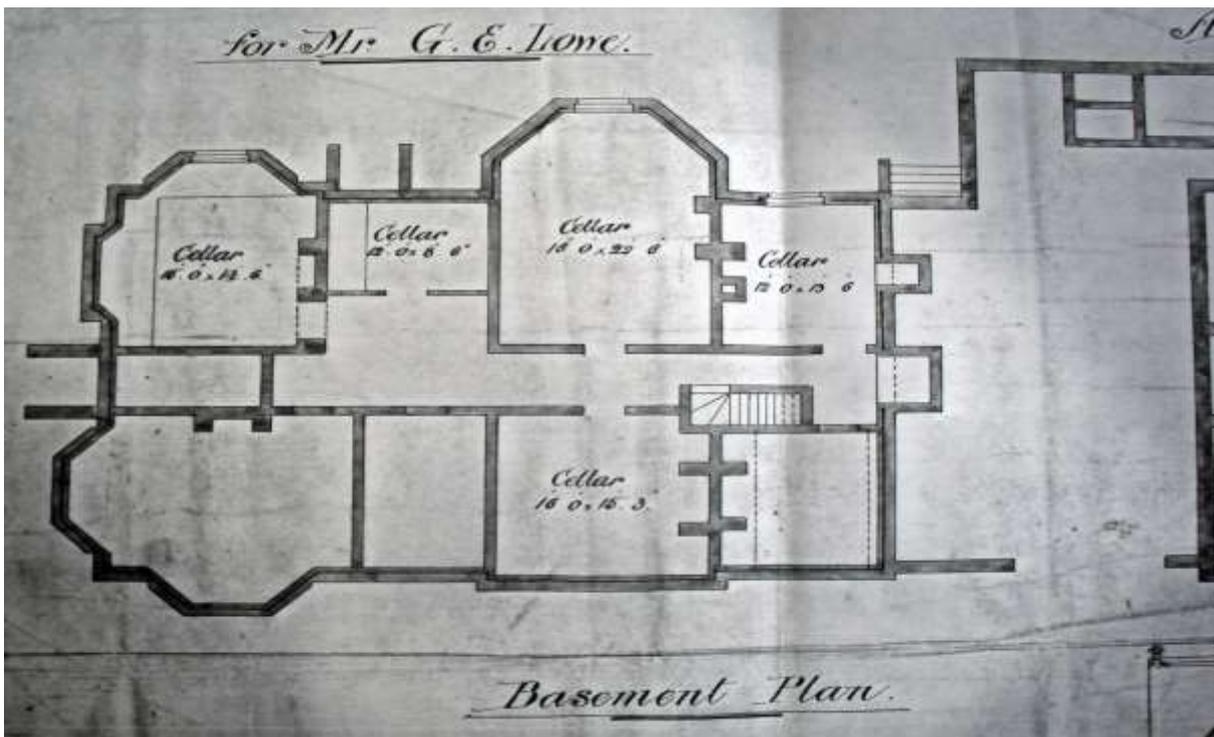
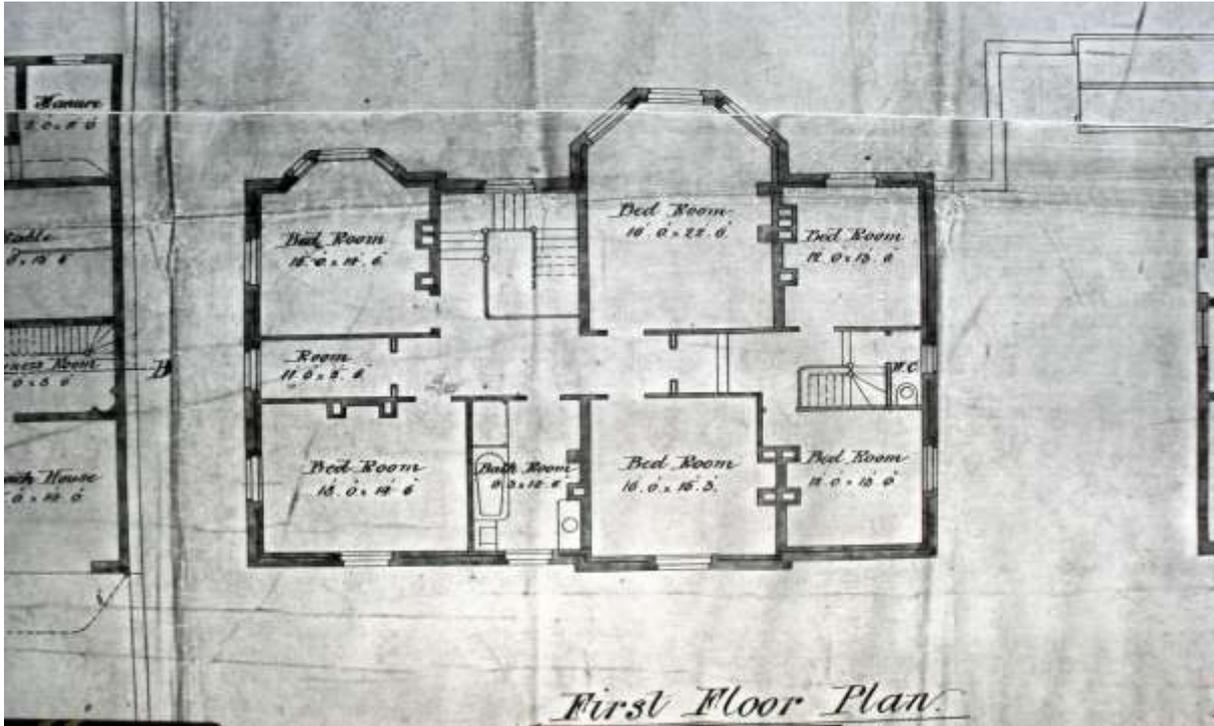
Architect & Surveyor William Jenkins 34 Bennetts Hill

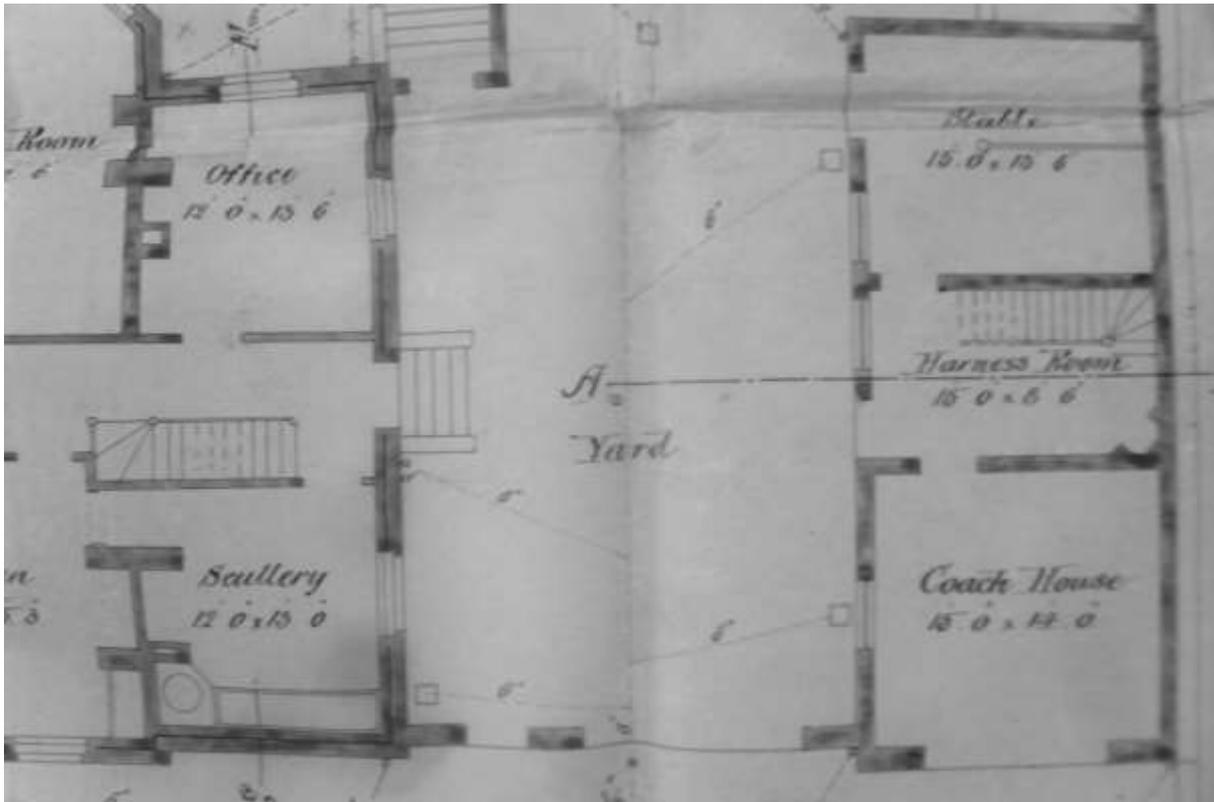
Builder — Mr Wm. Lee Avenue Road Aston Manor

Approved February 1896



Ground Floor Plan





Offices and Outbuildings

Appendix B: Mrs Florence Lowe's gift of "Oakhurst" to the Borough Council 1934, and the protest from local residents

The Mayor read the following communication from Councillor Mrs. F. M. Lowe.

Copy.

"OAK HURST,"
SUTTON COLDFIELD,
WARWICKSHIRE.

February, 1934.

TO THE MAYOR, COUNCILLOR A. E. TERNY, J.P.

Dear Mr. Mayor,

It was a hope often expressed to me by my late husband that "Oak Hurst" should be used after my death for some useful public purpose. Since 1927, when he died, the grounds have been improved, and the garden "House of Friendship" built. The land is freehold and is in a central position in the town where an open space should be increasingly valuable in the days to come.

In addition to this there is the house itself and for some time I have wondered whether a part of it might not with advantage be used by the people of the town as Public Reading Rooms and Library. For a long time, as you know, the Council has wanted to meet this public need but there have been difficulties in the way.

If this idea commends itself to the Council I should like in my life-time to give the whole property to the Corporation. So long as I continue to live in the town and pursue my various interests, I should like to keep for my own use some rooms in the house. I should expect the Corporation to take the entire charge and cost of maintenance of that portion of the house used in connection with the Public Library and Reading Rooms and also to be responsible for the maintenance of the outside of the house, but as long as I am living here I would gladly undertake the upkeep and management of the rest of the house and the

grounds and the " House of Friendship "—indeed I hope I might during what I should describe as this transitional period be helpful to, and work in close co-operation with, the Corporation.

If the Council approve these suggestions, I think it might be left to the Town Clerk and my Solicitors to arrange all the details for the approval of the appropriate Committee and myself, with a view to the gift being completed as soon as possible.

If you, Mr. Mayor, think that my suggestions will commend themselves to the Council, I have no objection to this letter being used in whatever way you think proper.

Believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) FLORENCE M. LOWE.

P.S.—My Solicitors have supplied the Town Clerk with particulars of certain restrictions.

It was moved by the Mayor and seconded by Councillor Lawrence and

RESOLVED—

564. That this Council do place on record their appreciation of the very generous offer made by Councillor Mrs. Lowe of " Oak Hurst " and grounds, and accept the gift on behalf of the Town with sincere gratitude.

Sutton Coldfield.

27th March, 1934.

*To His Worship the Mayor, The Aldermen, and Councillors
of the Borough of Sutton Coldfield.*

Dear Sirs,

OAKHURST HOUSE AND GROUNDS, ANCHORAGE ROAD.

We, the undersigned, residents in the Anchorage and Mulroy Roads, Sutton Coldfield, desire to bring before your Council our interests as residents and/or owners of property so far as they may be affected by the acceptance by the Council of Mrs. Councillor Lowe's gift of the above property for a public free library. We are not opposed to a public free library in Sutton Coldfield, and many of us are in favour of such a provision ; but we venture the opinion that Oakhurst House is unsuitable for the purpose primarily having regard to its situation, and

secondly on account of its design and construction. For the reason of our first objection we feel it could not be put to anything like its full use; and for the reasons prompting both objections, we consider there would be no real economy in the long run as against the provision by the Council of a library built for the purpose in a central situation frequented by the great majority of those to whom it would be of greatest use.

Anchorage Road is completely developed by private residences, and we believe the whole of the land in that road is restricted to that purpose only, so that the use of the house as a public building would be a breach of such restriction.

We do not know what information the Council has as to any adaptation of the buildings that may be necessary, and as to the capital value of keeping these buildings inside and outside in repair, but in estimating the value to the Borough of the gift we presume the Council will take into consideration these costs as well as the larger consideration, viz: the limits of its usefulness due to situation. As ratepayers, as well as residents, we ask that the matter shall be more thoroughly considered, and that some effort shall be made to ascertain the wishes of the ratepayers in general before the Council commits the Borough to an expense which may be unjustified, and by reason of the restriction before mentioned may preclude its use as a public library.

Further, we are very much perturbed as to the use to which the grounds of Oakhurst may be put. It has recently come to our knowledge that Mrs. Councillor Lowe had made arrangements, and had actually all but commenced, to construct a tea hall 70 feet long on the land near to the House of Friendship at the rear of residences in Mulroy Road. Exception to such a building was taken at the instance of one of the residents. The erection has been postponed; but no undertaking has been given that it will not be proceeded with, and a request that it should not be proceeded with without due notice to the resident in question has been refused.

We respectfully submit that the threatened detraction from the amenities of this particular neighbourhood is substantially greater than the proposal last year to utilise or sell certain land on the main road as available for the erection of shops. On that occasion your Council on behalf of the residential area strongly endeavoured to prevent the erection of shops; and we ask that the Council shall make no less effort to protect us. We submit the Council should not be deterred from so doing because it may be interested by reason of its ownership of the property.

In conclusion, we would draw your consideration to the following facts :-

(1) The whole of the land fronting to both roads is strictly restricted against buildings other than those of private dwellinghouses ;

(2) That at a re-assessment of properties in the Borough some five or six years ago in this district the rateable values of most, if not all, of the houses in the district were increased ;

(3) That the frontagers to Mulroy Road have recently at their own and a very considerable expense made up that road to the full requirements of the Council under the provisions of the Private Street Works Act ; and

(4) That the undeveloped land at the rear of Oakhurst residence and gardens is within the Council's town planning scheme or resolutions.

We shall be grateful if any reply to this representation may be made to Mr. E. E. Moore, Mulroy House.

Yours faithfully,

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Address.</i>
WALTER HEAPS	The Cottage, Mulroy Road.
CHARLES H. ATTWOOD	18, Anchorage Road.
A. LEONARD RETALLACK....	19 and 27, Anchorage Road.
C. HOLME BARNETT	54, Anchorage Road.
GEORGE PARSONS	40, Anchorage Road.
WALTER S. GOODMAN	Summercourt, Mulroy Road.
HENRY SIMS	The Chestnuts, Mulroy Road.
LIONEL F. FOSTER	62, Anchorage Road.
G. R. MOORE	The Shiel, Mulroy Road.
W. C. GLOVER	20, Anchorage Road.
I. PLOWRIGHT	Harrowby, Mulroy Road.
ANNIE TONKS	The Rookery, Mulroy Road.
MURIEL G. LANGLEY	1, Anchorage Road.
S. G. GLOVER	56, Anchorage Road.
E. E. FRAY (Mrs.)	50, Anchorage Road.
A. A. WAREING	44, Anchorage Road.
J. H. HAINES	Southfield, Mulroy Road.
J. H. CORNWELL	13, Anchorage Road.
G. HERBERT WHITE	The Croft, Mulroy Road.
A. J. WHILE	Barrie, Mulroy Road.
G. H. PARSONS (Mrs.)	40, Anchorage Road.
H. M. KEELING (Mrs.)	Barn House, Mulroy Road.
H. HOPKINS	Station House, Anchorage Road.
A. H. STURDEE	21, Anchorage Road.
H. E. WALKER	64, Anchorage Road.

<i>Name.</i>	<i>Address.</i>
G. E. DAVIES	Glentherne, Mulroy Road.
J. F. FOXLEY	3, Anchorage Road.
WILLIAM BELLAMY	c/o Wentworth Lodge, Four Oaks p.p. Greenhill, Anchorage Road).
CHARLES KEELING	Barn House, Mulroy Road.
E. E. MOORE	Mulroy Road.
ELITH M. MOORE	Mulroy House.
J. C. YEOMANS	Metchley, Anchorage Road.
E. E. WALKER	64, Anchorage Road.
A. R. WILKINSON	Ellesmere, 58, Anchorage Road.
W. A. WILKINSON	Ditto.
M. L. HOLME BARNETT (Mrs.)	54, Anchorage Road.
M. A. WHITWORTH (Mrs.)	52, Anchorage Road.
G. F. LANGLEY (Mrs.)	1, Anchorage Road.
E. HIGGS	Hovedene, Anchorage Road.
L. K. WHILE (Mrs.)	The Croft, Mulroy Road.
G. H. WHILE	Ditto.
ELLEN WHILE (Mrs.)	Barrie, Mulroy Road.
A. G. MOORE (Mrs.)	The Shiel, Mulroy Road.
M. G. MOORE (Miss)	Ditto.
T. HARPER	Ridgemoor, Mulroy Road.
H. ARNOLD	46, Anchorage Road.
JOSEPH FRAY	50, Anchorage Road.
KATHLEEN T. JONES	c/o 50, Anchorage Road.
F. WHITWORTH, JR.	52, Anchorage Road.
E. M. FOSTER	62, Anchorage Road.
J. I. ATKINS	The Bracken, Anchorage Road.
E. M. REAVLEY	Ditto.
N. E. M. TURNER	14, Anchorage Road.
E. ROWLEY	Oak House, Mulroy Road.
A. M. BAILLIE	Wynstay, Mulroy Road.
J. W. BAILLIE	Ditto.
M. H. FOSTER	St. Stephens, Sutton Coldfield.
E. OLDBURY	24, Anchorage Road.
G. DAVIS	19, Anchorage Road.
ALBATES TURNER	14, Anchorage Road.
DAWSON COLLINS	9, Anchorage Road.
D. G. COLLINS	Ditto
WINIFRED J. DAVIES	

RESOLUTIONS.

" That this Meeting of residents and property owners in the Anchorage and Mulroy Roads, Sutton Coldfield, (1) is satisfied the use of Oakhurst House as a library, or as any other public building, would be destructive of the amenities of the district, and will use all its power and influence to oppose such user,

(2) that for the same reason it strongly resents the proposed erection by Mrs. Councillor Lowe of a tea house in Oakhurst grounds, and calls upon the Council to take every step necessary to prevent it, (3) that a copy of the foregoing resolutions are sent to the Mayor of Sutton Coldfield."

