

Tudor Road — an early history

By Richard Morris

Introduction

The following is the result of research done some years ago in Sutton Coldfield Local History Library. I have now written up this work and am circulating it to you in commemoration of the centenary of the building of our houses. I hope you find it interesting. (This article was circulated to the residents of Tudor Road — ed.)

The Houses

Tudor Road was laid out in 1899. Prior to that the land was open fields called Clifton's Hills. An 1870 map shows an unnamed path running from the station, along the line of Tudor Road, across Clifton Road, along what is now the right of way up to the 'Tudor Hill building estate'. Park Road and Clifton Road are named, Railway Road is not. In November 1899 the Highways Committee resolved that "...as Tudor Road has been satisfactorily completed under the Private Street Works Act 1892 and the apportionments have been paid... the road be declared a Highway repairable by the inhabitants at large."

On 14 March of that year a Building Notice was submitted by Roger H Harley of 57 Colmore Row, Birmingham for the construction of villa residences. The notice was signed by Harley as owner, agent, architect and builder. Doubtless this was speculative building for rental income. The notice outlines various structural and related matters including the materials to be used — brick and slate, the thickness of the external and party walls — 9 inches and the room heights for each floor — 9 feet 6 inches and 9 feet. The lowest floor was to be 8 inches above the footpath and the gardens 24 yards long. The reference library in Sutton holds floor plans and elevations submitted by Harley. A building plan was then deposited by Harley on 16 March of that year for 22 houses. This plan was approved subject to the drainage being to the satisfaction of the Borough Surveyor.

Building then proceeded. The library holds a communication between Harley and the Borough Surveyor (W A H Clarry) and a number of Notices which were signed off by a W J Bickford (probably his assistant) as work progressed. These notices related to foundations, drains, and damp courses. Generally the only comment is 'satisfactory'. The first of the notices dates from April 1899 and the last from July 1901. On them Harley is variously described as 'builder' 'architect' and 'owner'. The houses were built in groups but it has not been possible to determine in which order they were finished, although evidence from the Rate Books suggests they were built from Upper Clifton Road — that is from number one onward.

In the early years some of the houses had names as well as numbers. Number one was 'Mount Pleasant', number two 'Park View', number five 'Deancroft', number 13 'Ellerslie', number 14 'Quenby', number 16 'Fernlea' and number 18 'Ivy Dene'. Of these only 'Fernlea' seems to have survived any length of time and appears in the 1920 Register of Electors.

During this time the address is variously given as 'Tudor Road' or 'New Road'. I have not been able to establish why Tudor Road was so named. The Tudor Hill district clearly predates Tudor Road, but Tudor Hill itself is not shown as being named as a road on the 1904 OS map.

In 1902 the Electric Lighting Committee resolved that 'public and private lighting be extended to Upper Clifton Road and Tudor Road'. The cost for Tudor Road was £63.00 (of which £55.00 related to private works) and the work was completed by September 1902.

The Builder

Nor has it been possible to find out much about Harley. He is listed in Kelly's Directory of Birmingham from 1890 to 1900, but disappears from the 1902 edition. His address starts out as 4 Cherry Street and also Witton Wharf where he is described as a coal merchant. From 1892 he has the Colmore Row address. During the building period his address is given as Signal Hayes, Walmley. His ownership of Tudor Road can be gleaned from the Rate Books. In 1901 he is shown as owning properties 1 to 8, the rest being owned by a William Parrott (listed in Kelly's as house agent, surveyor and insurance agent, also having offices on Colmore Row). From 1902 to 1907 he is shown as sole owner and is listed as living in number 21 from 1907 to 1909. From 1908 onwards the owner is Parrot and Antrobus (Agents). The first indication that houses were being sold off is in the 1920 Register of Electors which shows Florence Kimberley at number 8 as owner occupier.



Tudor Road from Railway Road

The Residents

It has been suggested to me that the houses were built to house railway, police or other workers. I have been unable to find any supporting evidence and consider it unlikely. The railway had been in operation for nearly forty years when the houses were built and the high turnover of residents suggests against a relatively stable occupation like the police or fire service.

Names of residents, but little else, may be obtained from the Rate Books. The rateable value is also shown. This is generally 16 shillings 10 pence, although there are minor variations between the properties and evidence of appeals against over assessment. The amount payable was around £2 12 shillings.

The Rate Books continue till 1914 and show the high turnover referred to above. For example, of the 21 residents listed in 1902 (the first full year) only three remain in residence in 1909. In 1906 rates are shown as irrecoverable from nine properties due to their being unoccupied. By 1914 only one of the original residents (Charles Wilkes, number 16) is still in occupation and 12 properties are shown as unoccupied

Some other information on the residents can be obtained from the Sutton Coldfield Erdington and District Directory. The 1900 edition shows occupants in numbers one to four. The 1901-2 edition, besides giving us the house names tells us that a Mrs Scott in number 18 gave banjo lessons and that Mrs Searle in number 21 ran the Cloverdale Registry Office — an employment agency. Both these businesses advertised in the Directory. In addition number 17 was the District Office of the Refuge Assurance Company, with Mr Murray as manager. Unfortunately no other relevant Directories exist.

Pictures

I know of only two early pictures relating to Tudor Road. The first is in 'Sutton Coldfield' by Marion Baxter (pub. Alan Sutton, 1994) and shows a view of the back of the Council House taken from Tudor Road. The photograph is dated circa 1902 although there seems to be a bowling green in the foreground, which of course would make it much later. The second is in 'Sutton Coldfield A Pictorial History' by S. Bates (pub. Bibbles' 1997) and shows a view taken from the Railway Road end. The caption suggests that the houses were built between 1882 and 1914 which is clearly wrong. There is a horse and cart on the road and no parked cars. No date is given but the absence of mature trees on the bowling green side suggests it is relatively early. The bowling green area is fenced with railings and there is only one lamppost visible. All houses still have the characteristic round headed gateposts, the last of which disappeared only recently. In addition there is a picture in the *Birmingham Mail* of 7 March 1939 taken from high up behind the bowling green which shows a few of the houses.

The Bowling Green and Tennis Courts

The Tennis Courts opened in late summer of 1925. Prior to this it was proposed 'to let off on building leases land fronting (Upper) Clifton Road and Tudor Road'.

Advertisements were posted and applications received but the Council then decided to level the land and build tennis courts and a bowling green. At this time the site was used as a yard for the highways department and was evidently an eyesore. There was talk of 'putting it in order'.

The relevant minutes authorise the levelling of fields to the rear of the Council House. This work cost some £430, mainly in wages and horse hire and was funded by a 75% grant from the Unemployment Grants Committee so as to '...afford employment for the large number of local men who are at present unemployed'.

Three hard courts were laid by Stevenson & Allday with other firms supplying tapes, surrounds, a pavilion, cycle houses and mains water. The total cost was £562. In November the Borough Surveyor was instructed to proceed with the completion of the scheme and build one more hard court and a bowling green. Tenders for the groundwork were sent out in November of 1925. In January of 1926 it was resolved to use turf 'from the lawn near to the Fire Station' (then on its old site in King Edward Square) to surface the green. This is later reported in the *Sutton Coldfield News* as being 'turf from the old green abutting Upper Clifton Road'. In February tenders were invited for a pavilion — secured by J D Darlington with a bid of £138. The bowling green opened in May 1927. Total expenditure for the whole venture — courts and green, excluding the initial levelling, was £1224.

The opening of the green was marked by a ceremony with a match between teams chosen by the Mayor and the Chairman of the Parks Committee. Tea was served in the Town Hall, there were speeches and 'play continued until late evening'.

The income and expenditure accounts for the courts and green are available for a number of years. It is clear that they have always made a loss with expenditure typically of around £250, mostly wages, with income of around a hundred pounds. In 1928 a bowling green season ticket cost 15 shillings a season or five shillings a month. In 1929 a bowling club was formed. This was called the Tudor Road Bowling Club and its first match, against Little Aston was mentioned in the *Sutton Coldfield News* of 11 May of that year. In 1932 an advertisement in the *Birmingham Post* states that the courts have been renewed and can be booked by phoning the attendant on telephone number 2213.

The remaining item of interest is the proposal, in 1939, to use the site for a new fire station (the 1939 photograph mentioned above refers to this). The Mayor, J J Ogley was reported to be much in favour although there was opposition from Alderman Pearson (coincidentally the first President of the Bowling Club) who pointed out that 'hundreds of pounds have been spent putting it right and making it useful'. In May of 1939 the Fire Brigade and Hackney Carriage Committee requested the Borough Surveyor to 'proceed with presentation of plans for the erection of a fire station on the Anchorage Road site', so it seems that Alderman Pearson won the argument.

Further Research

I welcome any additions or corrections to this account. I am especially interested in any information on the movement from rental to ownership.