

# **Roy Billingham Photographic Collection**

## **Sutton Park – Midland Lodge,**

**[Ordnance Survey Grid Reference: SP 1121 9715]**

**William Jenkins, Architect & Surveyor, Bennetts Hill, Birmingham.**

**Built in 1879-80 by J. Simons, Park Lane, Aston.**

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### **A Brief History of Midland Lodge**

Midland Lodge is a Victorian residential property situated within Sutton Park and owned by Birmingham City Council. It lies adjacent to the Midland Gate entrance to the Park which is at the western end of Midland Road. This private road, built by the Midland Railway Company in 1879, provided pedestrian access for their passengers to and from Sutton Park Station up-line platform to the new entrance gate into the Park. In the early years the Midland Railway provided ticket inspectors at the entrance to the Park.

The architecture of the cottage is Victorian Gothic Revival and this can be identified by the pitch of the roof with its three elegant tall chimney stacks, the prominent south and north over-facing gable ends with their distinctive mock timber-framed patterns and stucco infills, the prominent decorative bargeboards with their simple three-leaf clover frettings, the decorated fascia panels, the single Gothic pointed-arch side window to the south facing reception room, and the use of terracotta brick segmental arches with equal voussoirs and chamfered surrounds to the doors and windows. This style came back into fashion in the 1880s and 90s as the influence of what was to become labelled the Arts and Crafts movement encouraged a return to vernacular methods. Benjamin Stone's 1910 photograph of the cottage shows the bedroom windows were casement type with a pair to a window frame while the ground floor reception room windows were sash type. We can also observe that the roofs were originally fitted with decorated terracotta ridge tiles and the chimney pots were yellow terracotta Crown Kings.

The Midland Railway Company of Derby began the construction of their Sutton Park Line in the spring of 1875 running south from Walsall to Castle Bromwich. The line included four stations within Sutton Coldfield at Streetly, Sutton Park (originally planned to be called Tudor Hill), Sutton Coldfield Town, and Penns. The Sutton Park Line opened to all traffic on July 1, 1879.

The effect of the construction of this line was to be a vast increase in the number of visitors from Birmingham and the Black Country to the Park. Anticipating this increase and bearing in mind the remoteness at that time of the new entrance and the need to police it, the Corporation thought it expedient to build a lodge and expected the Railway Company to fund the building cost.

During the latter stages of the construction of the line there had been a lot of legal wrangling between the Warden and Society and the Midland Railway Company over compensation for unpaid bills, disputes over further land being taken, the funding of a lodge at the new entrance gate, and an agreement over an area of the Park called the Ballast Land which is opposite the

cottage and skirts the railway line. An agreement on compensation was eventually reached by April 1879.

This meant that the Corporation now had sufficient funds to build a lodge adjacent to the new entrance and in June 1879 the Town Surveyor, Charles Cooper, was recommended by the Park Committee to obtain plans with an estimate of price from William Jenkins, architect and surveyor of Bennett's Hill, Birmingham. The plans were completed by July 1879 with an estimated cost of between £400 and £500. At their next meeting on July 14, 1879, the Warden and Society approved the recommendation to adopt these plans for the erection of the lodge at a cost "not under any circumstances to exceed £500". Six local builders submitted tenders for the construction and the lowest bidder, with a price of £475, was J. Simons of Park Lane, Aston, who was awarded the contract in August 1879.

At the same time Mr. Haywood and Mr. Cooper set out the precise location for the lodge so that construction could begin within the month. New Lodge, as the new building was to be called initially, was completed by April 1880.

The land measurement of the property was officially stated in the Borough Surveyor's Annual Report of 1887 as 1 rood and 20 perches, i.e. 1,815 square yards (1,518 square metres) or just over one third of an acre. As built, the house was described as comprising two reception rooms, a kitchen, a larder and three bedrooms. Much later, in 1934, one of the bedrooms was converted into a bathroom. However, there was no provision for the supply of gas, and cooking was done on a range. The cottage would not be wired for electricity until early 1944 when an extension of service cable from the Blackroot entrance was laid on. At the same time, it was decided to install a bath; this was prompted by a change in tenancy.

The construction programme for New Lodge included the digging of a well and fitting of a pump to provide a water supply as well as the installation of a soft water tank with pump. The supply of water from the well was not without its problems and in April 1888 the Borough Surveyor had reason to doubt the quality of the water and instructed Mr. Thickbroom of Windley (sic), a local wheelwright and tenant of Windley Sawmill, to inspect the well and pump. Progress was somewhat slow because it took until April the following year before the Borough Surveyor reported back that the water supply to Midland Lodge was so impure that he could not recommend the sinking of another well. Consequently, the Council agreed to the South Staffordshire Waterworks Company laying on a water supply to Midland Lodge.

From the time of the decision to build a lodge at Midland Gate it was not the Corporation's intention that it should be a gate lodge providing accommodation for a gate keeper. It was larger than the other Park gate lodges and thus more prestigious. So, in the early years, with the odd exception, tenants were chosen from respondents to public notices. After the First World War the situation changed and tenants were usually senior Park staff.