

Group visit to the historic village of Stoneleigh

THE history group hits the road in June with a visit to the picturesque village of Stoneleigh, an ancient settlement in the former Forest of Arden, situated only a few miles from Coventry.

Stoneleigh is steeped in history and has always had a close relationship with Coventry. Several of our modern suburbs - such as Canley, Tile Hill, Fletchamstead and Westwood - were once rural parts of Lord Leigh's vast Stoneleigh estate.



Stoneleigh Abbey, close to the village, was acquired by Sir Thomas Leigh, Mayor of London, in 1558 and it remained in the hands of the family until 1996. Many of the village's inhabitants would once have worked for the Abbey.

"With its pretty timber-framed and thatched cottages, lovely sandstone almshouses and historic church, Stoneleigh is in many ways a typical English village," says the Stoneleigh History Society, whose chair Sheila Woolf will be our guide for the visit on Friday June 19th.



Photos: Stoneleigh History Society

The tour begins at 2pm on June 19th. Details of our exact meeting place, transport options and parking arrangements will be sent out nearer the time. A charge of £2 will be made to cover expenses, which includes donations to the village.

Sheila will take us on a gentle stroll around the village, pointing out its historic features, and we will end our tour with refreshments in the 12th century St Mary's Church, which has a permanent display of village history.

Group members will be asked to make their own way to Stoneleigh and it would be much appreciated if those with cars can offer a lift to those without transport.

The tour begins at 2pm on June 19th. Details of our exact meeting place, transport options and parking arrangements will be sent out nearer the time. A charge of £2 will be made to cover expenses, which includes donations to the village.

Stoke Local History Group
Friday June 19th, beginning at 2pm
Visit to Stoneleigh Village

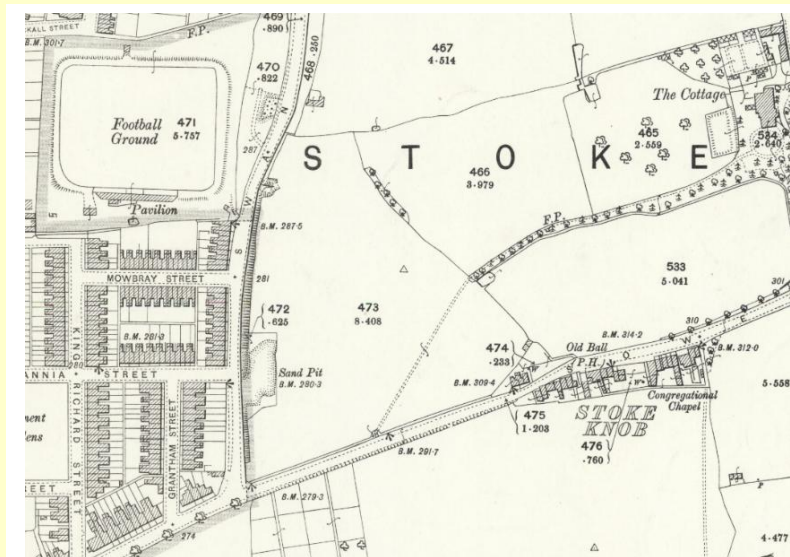
Creating a Ball Hill suburb – the building of Villiers Street, Chandos Street, Clements Street, Richmond Street, Brighton Street

IN last month's *Jabet's Ash* we looked at The Cottage, a large house in Clay Lane owned by lace manufacturer Joshua Perkins. Behind his house, as the map shows, was an extensive piece of land, much of it owned by Perkins, which formed part of a continuous section of open land from Clay Lane to Swan Lane.

From about 1905 onwards, this section of land was to become part of a newly created Ball Hill suburb, with new streets laid out and hundreds of new houses built. The new homes were usually simple terraced houses, two-up, two-down, often with no front gardens and built in a series of tightly knit parallel streets. The streets were named Villiers Street, Chandos Street, Clements Street, Richmond Street and Brighton Street.

The new streets offered homes for Coventry's burgeoning working class, who flocked to the area for employment in the city's new manufacturing industries, such as the massive new Humber Works in Folly Lane, which opened in 1908. The houses also offered a refuge for those wishing to escape the intensely overcrowded city centre, with workers at Parkside or elsewhere preferring to cycle each day to their workplace from Stoke.

The new houses were often basic and cheap to build. A typical house would have small rooms, thin walls, an outside loo, a coal house, a parlour, kitchen and two bedrooms. But they were clearly superior to the slum conditions still prevalent in the city centre courts. Byelaws adopted in 1891 enforced minimum standards for new buildings. And unlike the crowded courts, every house had a back garden, accessed through a series of narrow alleyways which punctuated each terrace. *Continued on next page...*



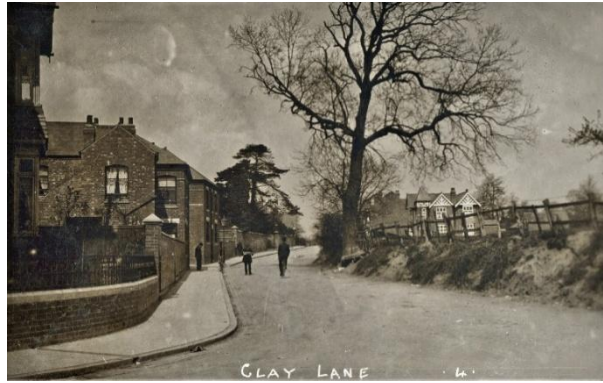
Part of Stoke (above), around 1903, with Ball Hill shown as the small hamlet of Stoke Knob. The Cottage in Clay Lane is in the top right corner of the map, and behind it is open land, stretching down to Swan Lane. The football ground was the home of Coventry City FC, who moved here in 1899. The map below shows the same area in 1912, by which time the whole area is filled with new streets. Still marked on the map is The Cottage, which later became Stoke Ex-Services Club. Note that house building in Richmond Street and Brighton Street is still incomplete, and a railway line (the Loop Line) is under construction. New streets have also appeared on the opposite side of Walsgrave Road.



The exception to the general pattern was Clements Street, which linked the development together, crossing the other streets from south to north. Some of the houses in this street were better quality, more refined, with front gardens and bow windows, perhaps reflecting their greater visibility from the main road. The variation in style also showed that different builders were involved in the construction process, each with their own plots and designs.

Much of the land for this housing development was owned initially by Joshua Perkins and sold by him or his son. Records at the City Archives show that Perkins acquired Stoke Cottage in 1886 and within three years it formed part of an estate covering an estimated 23 acres. This land was sold off to housing developers from 1902 to 1906.

During the same period similar development was taking place on the other side of Walsgrave Road and by 1910 a significant new suburb at Ball Hill had been created.



Clay Lane in 1913. The junction of Villiers Street, built circa 1905-08, is visible on the left and beyond that are the stone walls surrounding the grounds of Stoke Cottage.

All photos courtesy David Fry



Pictured left: Part of Villiers Street in 1910, photographed from the Clements Street junction, looking down towards Brighton Street. The terrace on the left was rare in this street because the houses were slightly set back from the road and had tiny front gardens. But this block failed to survive the Second World War when the houses were destroyed by enemy bombing. Villiers Street runs all the way from Brighton Street to Clay Lane, with most houses built directly onto the street, like the ones pictured on the right.



Left: Part of Chandos Street at the junction with Clements Street in 1913, looking east towards Clay Lane. Chandos Street formed a cul-de-sac because it was blocked at one end by a wall surrounding the grounds of Joshua Perkins' house, The Cottage, which still existed in Clay Lane. The Cottage became Stoke Ex-

Services Club in 1923 and was much altered before being demolished in 2012. A medical centre took its place, some new houses were built, and the route from Chandos Street to Clay Lane was then opened up.

Continued on next page ...

Right: A number of corner shops were incorporated into these residential streets. This corner shop was on Brighton Street, at the lower end of Chandos Street, and was owned by Joseph Atkins who sold tobacco, sweets and provisions. Brighton Street was created in 1905 but was only slowly developed for housing. Local historian and postcard collector David Fry says this photograph shows Ada Ellen Atkins standing in the doorway with her niece Gladys. Other corner shops in the vicinity included a butcher, a fish and chip shop and a grocer. This shop in Brighton Street was later turned into a home.



This photograph (right) shows the posh side of Clements Street, with its gabled rooflines, bow windows and front gardens. This view is looking towards Walsgrave Road. The houses on the right are more typical of the area, a straightforward terrace with tiny front gardens. It seems clear that postcard photographers had a preference for the smarter terraces, no doubt believing that these cards would sell better.



The area today is much the same as it was when first built, but numerous improvements are likely to have been made to the houses, including the provision of better damp proofing, bathrooms and central heating. A good proportion of the houses are now owner-occupied but when first built they were more likely to be rented from private landlords. Newspaper advertisements in 1910 show that the typical rent for a house in Villiers Street was around six shillings and six pence per week. □ JM



Date for your diary
Stoke Local History Group visit

Midland Air Museum, Baginton
including Frank Whittle Heritage Centre
Friday July 10th, beginning at 11am.

Further information about the museum will appear in the next issue of Jabet's Ash. Places will need to be booked in advance with the history group. The museum, a registered charity, will charge £11 per person, which includes a guided tour for the group. Anyone wishing to reserve a place now can do so by contacting John at stokehistorygroup@gmail.com