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HERBERT COLLINS

1885 - 1975

by

Robert Williams

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Herbert Collins.

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The Collins family in the grounds of Rookfield, Muswell Hill (c. 1905) with Herbert seated front, his parents and brothers and sisters:
William, Ralph, Ada, Martyn and Ethel.

THE MAN AND HIS WORK

Herbert Collins himself was something of an enigma. He was a tall, upright man, with a quiet manner and tremendous composure. He is remembered as idealistic, single minded, resolute and rather reserved. His sense of humour was often so quiet and private as to be missed or misunderstood. Although he could appear frugal in some ways, he was always extremely generous to those in need, as numerous 'anonymous' donations to various projects demonstrate. He remained very modest about his own achievements although he became one of the country's leading architects of inter-war housing.

Herbert Collins was born on 2 February 1885 at Edmonton, North London. His grandfather was a successful bookbinder who founded Benjamin Collins and Sons of London. Although several of his sons entered the family business, Herbert's father, William Jefferies Collins (1856-1939) became a speculative builder in the late nineteenth century tradition. He had a shrewd business sense and made his fortune buying up land adjacent to recently opened railway lines, on which he built houses to meet the needs of the growing and flourishing middle classes moving out to the suburbs of North London.

W. J. Collins married a music teacher, Mary Martin, and they had six children: Ada, William, Herbert, Ethel, Martyn and Ralph. For some years the Collins family lived at 'Fortismere', a large house at Fortis Green, North London, with a lake in the grounds on which Herbert and his brothers went boating. In 1899 their father bought a piece of land to the south of Muswell Hill, including the cottage 'Lalla Rookh', one time home of the poet Thomas Moore, and Rookfield House, the former home of A. W. Gamage, the department store proprietor. About 1900, Rookfield became the Collins family home and Fortismere was demolished, the lake drained and the grounds divided up by W. J. Collins for building.

W. J. Collins operated from an office in Elms Avenue and employed a labour force of about thirty men. The houses were built in straight conventional streets, such as Fortismere, Leaside and Grand Avenues, using standardised narrow frontage plans from an unknown architect. However, the houses are enlivened by generous Edwardian decoration, with ornamental woodwork and plasterwork.

Herbert attended nearby Mill Hill School between 1897 and 1900. He is remembered as an all-round sportsman, winning the swimming prize and representing the school in the 2nd XI and in diving, fives and gymnastics. Although he and his elder brother William showed considerable talent at art they were not allowed to continue their education as their father put them to work in his building business. They started at the bottom, working alongside his men as carpenters. Herbert obtained City and Guilds certificates in carpentry and brickwork in 1903, and a year later passed a Board of Education building construction examination at South Kensington. Although Herbert and his brothers disliked the practical work at the time, it must have profoundly influenced their handling of building materials and attention to detail in their later careers. Herbert and William became architects, Ralph became a builder, but Martyn was tragically killed in Flanders during the First World War.

W. J. Collins encouraged his sons to travel widely: Herbert spent holidays in Scandinavia and Europe and in about 1910 visited South Africa. After working for their father by day, Herbert and William attended evening classes in architecture. Herbert studied history of architecture under Banister Fletcher and obtained University of London certificates of merit for courses held between 1914 and 1919 at the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Central School of Arts and Crafts. He also studied part-time at the Architectural Association School of Architecture, and records show that he passed his third year certificate in 1919. By this time he had already built many houses on his father's estate and was trading under the name of 'Herbert & Company'.

W. J. Collins produced a site layout for the development of the Rookfield Estate and in about 1901 started building on the boundaries in Muswell Hill and Etheldene Avenue. As on the Fortismere Estate, the houses were built with narrow frontages in long straight terraces to make maximum use of the site. However, their design, with smallpane casement windows and simple hooded front doors, was influenced by the then fashionable 'Queen Anne movement' and hint at what was to become the 'Collins Style'. W. J. Collins soon turned his attention to other parts of his estates and left Rookfield for his sons Herbert and William to develop.

'Herbert & Co.' were responsible for the development of the west side of Rookfield Avenue. Building started at the northern end in 1906, when Herbert was twenty-one. Already showing a departure from his father's work, the houses are more varied with wider frontages, built in shorter terraces along a curving road with carefully preserved trees. The houses incorporate fashionable architectural features of the time — roughcast walls, corner windows, small-paned casements, large gables, and 'battered' brickwalls to the front porches. Herbert was no doubt influenced by the work of such architects as Parker and Unwin, Voysey, Baillie Scott and Lutyens who were involved with Hampstead Garden Suburb being built at the same time less than two miles away.

The whole of the west side of Rookfield Avenue was completed by 1911 and the four and five bedroom houses were sold for about £450 leasehold. From 1909 to 1922 Herbert and his first wife Ann Squire Holman, a farmer's daughter from Oxfordshire, lived at No. 31 Rookfield Avenue. The complicated design of the houses, some incorporating semi-basement tradesmen's entrances and backstairs for servants, contrast with the order and simplicity of Herbert's later work.

In 1911 his father moved to Southampton and the house Rookfield was demolished to make way for further building. His brother William founded the Rookfield Garden Village Co. Ltd. in 1912 and was responsible for most of the remaining development of the site. William's houses are carefully detailed and designed in styles derived from late seventeenth and early eighteenth century traditional buildings. Cranmore Way and Rookfield Close are characteristic of his work, with a communal green and trees retained from the grounds of 'Rookfield'. Herbert later adapted many features from his brother's designs for his own housing schemes around Southampton, and they kept in close touch with each other, exchanging advice and ideas.

In 1913 Herbert wrote a short article in the *Hornsey Journal* in which he made a



Rookfield Avenue, Muswell Hill, the first houses designed by Herbert Collins (1906-1911). His own home, No 31, second from left.



Rookfield Close, Muswell Hill, designed by Herbert's brother William, who was responsible for most of Rookfield Garden Village.

Read these letters

W.E.C.
Sept 20 1923

My dear Herbert,

I am very glad to hear that you & Clara have got into close touch with one another. The work of the Guild & of the New Town Trust will I know appeal strongly to you. I am so very very glad you are now a member of the Board - partly for the personal reason that I shall probably see more of you, but chiefly because I know how essential it is that the spirit that must be behind the movement if it is to be really effective is the spirit that animates you so strongly. You will be interested to hear - if you did not know already - that Horace H.E. Pigott of 13 Rookfield Ave. has subscribed for £200 in donations. G.D. Shaw subscribed recently for £2000 - both of these amounts were included in the figures given last Thursday.

Very many thanks to you both for all you have done about the Orsman. Anna is quite right in thinking that the wife pined a bit about its passing away from her control, but I believe she will really be the happier.

With best love to you both

Sir Ebenezer Howard

How to get the name 'New Town'.

Letter to Herbert from Sir Ebenezer Howard on his appointment to the Board of Welwyn Garden City.

plea for 'attractive roads' with four foot grass verges planted with trees between the road and the footpath. He pointed out that such roads were not permitted under the current bye-laws and appealed for a change in the law to encourage such a layout. However, his plea went unheeded and the local authority refused to adopt the roads on the Rookfield Estate, which therefore became the responsibility of the residents.

While qualifying in architecture, Herbert came into contact with the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association. For about eighteen months he was involved with the initial development of Welwyn Garden City and was appointed to the board of directors. The work inspired Herbert with the idea of setting up his own garden city. After his father moved to Southampton, Herbert often visited the town and pursued his interest in sailing. He saw the potential for a garden city on the western side of Southampton Water around the village of Marchwood, bordering the New Forest. In 1921 he approached Ebenezer Howard, founder of the Garden City Movement, with the idea and they visited the site together.

Unfortunately, in spite of enthusiastic encouragement from Howard and the promise of £25,000 from his father to cover the cost of the land, nothing came of the scheme. However, Herbert remained committed to the ideal of a garden city in that position for the rest of his life.

Following their initial meeting over the proposed garden city Herbert and Ebenezer Howard became close friends and often visited each other. Howard was a great inspiration; for many years Herbert had a photograph of him above his desk.

William Collins never officially qualified as an architect, but in 1921 Herbert passed the entrance examination of the Society of Architects and became a member. The following year Herbert and his wife left Rookfield and moved to Southampton to help his father to develop his estates there. At first they lived in the lodge cottage of W. J. Collins' house, 'The Wilderness' at West End. The main house has since been demolished but the brick and tile lodge cottage still stands in West End Road. In 1925 Herbert joined the RIBA as a licentiate, was elected as associate in 1926 and the following year also became an associate of the Town Planning Institute.

Late in 1922 Herbert and Anne moved into number 11 (now renumbered 59) Brookvale Road, one of the first houses he built on the Uplands Estate. For a while Herbert & Co. practiced from an address in newly built Highfield Close, but moved to a permanent office at 30 Portland Street in the town centre in 1927.

John G. Birkett, a qualified architect and planner, joined Herbert's office in about 1930 and they became partners. Birkett, who lived on the Bassett Green Estate, is remembered primarily as a planner, with Herbert retaining control over matters of design.

Herbert evolved his own distinctive style of building. His first houses in Rookfield Avenue were a complicated assembly of various 'arts and crafts' features. However, his first simple terrace of houses on the Uplands Estate in 1922 clearly shows the influence of the time he spent at Welwyn Garden City and the neo-Georgian style of the city's architect, Louis de Soissons. Unlike de Soissons and his architects who were responsible for building thousands of houses in a

relatively short time, Herbert was able to refine the style and to develop the potential of his sites to the full. He paid great attention to details, probably the result of his early practical training. The same small labour force, employed by his brother Ralph, were moved around the different sites as necessary, building houses at Uplands, Swaythling and Bassett Green.

About 1930 Herbert built himself a new house at 38 Brookvale Road, on a plot almost directly opposite his former home. In October 1935 he also moved offices from Portland Street to 32 Carlton Crescent. The move was well-timed, as his former offices were destroyed by bombing in the Second World War. About 1938, the partnership with Birkett ended; he later went on to work in the regional planning office at Reading. When J. Norman Calton came to work for Herbert as an assistant in 1939 he was then the only other member of staff. Mr. Calton came from Sussex, where he had been articled to a Hastings firm, and moved into a house designed by Herbert in the 1920s in Thornhill Park Road — where he has remained ever since. At the outbreak of the Second World War Mr. Calton joined the Royal Engineers.

Herbert was elected a fellow of the RIBA in 1940, and in 1941 became a fellow of the Royal Town Planning Institute. During the war Herbert's first wife, Ann, died and he set up a plaque to her memory in the loggia of his house in Brookvale Road. He met his second wife, Doreen, through the local branch of the League of Nations Union of which they were both active members. She shared his interest in music and art and was for sometime a music teacher and carpet designer. They had two children, Julie and Nigel.

After the Second World War, Mr. Calton rejoined the office and became a partner. As in his earlier partnership with Birkett, Herbert still remained in overall charge and work was carried out in the well established 'Collins' style. There was a maximum of six staff in the office during the partnership: Herbert, Mr. Calton, Mrs. Painter the secretary, and up to three assistants, including Peter Whitworth, who worked in the office from 1946 until 1954, when he left to work for the Council for Industrial Design.

In 1956 the partnership ended. Mr. Calton went on to work for the Southampton City Architect's Department, where he was responsible for the restoration and conversion of several of the city's historic buildings. About the same time, Mrs. Painter left. Herbert joined the list of retired members of the RTPI in 1957 when he was seventy-two. However, he still kept on the office at 32 Carlton Crescent and employed a new secretary, Mrs. Lee. In the late 1950s and early 1960s he undertook a number of design projects entirely by himself, besides being involved in the administration and day-to-day running of his various housing estates around Southampton. Herbert continued to work part-time in his office right up to his death in 1975, in his 91st year.

HERBERT COLLINS IN SOUTHAMPTON

Herbert Collins' architectural career spanned a remarkable sixty-six years, from designs for his father's estate in Muswell Hill in 1906 up to alterations and extensions to his own home in Southampton in 1972. Throughout his long career he designed less than fifteen hundred houses and flats and only a small number of non-domestic buildings. Many of his architectural contemporaries also started their careers with small housing schemes, but later progressed to larger, more prestigious commissions. However, Herbert's few non-domestic buildings are undistinguished and indicate that his talent lay in designing small-scale buildings. He had a genuine enthusiasm and commitment to housing work.

Despite the absence of important large buildings, Herbert's architectural career is remarkable for his unique contribution to housing, covering virtually all types — urban, suburban and rural; new build, conversion and rehabilitation; houses, bungalows, flats, cottages, bed-sitters, hostels and accommodation for the elderly; schemes for local authorities, housing societies, charities, and private clients; housing for rental and sale, both freehold and leasehold. Much of this work was initiated by the Collins family and often by Herbert himself, strictly against the RIBA code of conduct which forbade the financial involvement of architects in building developments. He was fortunate in having private means which enabled him to some extent to build as he wished, unlike other architects who had to rely solely on commissions. Moreover, Herbert used his own money to finance schemes which otherwise would not have been built, such as low rental flats and the reconstruction of Bitterne Manor.

Herbert's early schemes at Muswell Hill and the Uplands Estate were sponsored by his father and had to show a profit. Using the income generated by his speculative developments in London and Southampton, W. J. Collins later became a generous and well-known local benefactor. He held church garden parties and summer camps for the Boys' Brigade in the grounds of his house 'The Wilderness' at West End. He also inaugurated a trust fund for the benefit of the local Boys' Brigade and Girls' Brigade in memory of his son Martyn who was killed in the First World War. Herbert later became chairman of the trust and took a personal interest in the activities of the two organisations, attending various Brigade gatherings when possible. W. J. Collins' donation towards the building of Swaythling Methodist Hall included the clause that his son should be the architect. Herbert obtained several other commissions through his father's generous donations towards building costs, including the YMCA in Southampton, St. James' Church Hall at West End and the almshouses at Chandler's Ford.

Herbert was not such a shrewd businessman as his father and rather than working for motives of profit, he aimed to provide decent housing that almost anyone could afford. Much of his work reflects his idealistic principles. Following his early involvement with the garden city movement he remained dedicated to its ideals for the rest of his life. His own scheme for a garden city at Marchwood was never built but he based his housing developments on garden city principles and won the approval of Ebenezer Howard himself. Herbert had much in common

with the pioneers of the garden city movement. Like Raymond Unwin, he was an active member of the League of Nations, later the United Nations Association. He was also teetotal for most of his life and interested in the Non-conformist religions, designing both Methodist and Congregational Churches. Politically he followed the Liberal tradition of the Collins family, although he had leanings towards the Labour Party.

Herbert was interested in issues far beyond the immediate concerns of his architectural practice. He was a keen supporter of land nationalisation. In 1972 he wrote a paper on 'Development values and public control of land use', advocating State ownership of land and outlining a system of implementation through the issue of State Bonds to compensate land owners. Most of his houses were sold on 999-year leases with an annual ground rent payable to himself, the freeholder. This enabled him to retain overall control of the houses, as in the first garden cities, where leaseholders are under obligation not to alter their houses except with the permission of the freeholder.

Herbert was a member of the Council of the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (later called the Town and County Planning Association) from 1925 to 1945 and attended many of their conferences. He was also involved in planning issues locally as a member of the Southern Hampshire Regional Planning Committee. In 1930 he helped with the founding of the Hampshire branch of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England and remained on the committee for the next thirty years. Herbert was originally appointed as the representative of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Architectural Association and retired in 1960 after serving longer than any other member.

He was a founder member of the Southampton Civic Trust, later renamed the City of Southampton Society, and served as vice-chairman for many years, rarely missing a meeting. Herbert organised and led tours of the city for members and took an active role in many of the society's campaigns. He had a great affection for Southampton even though he only came to live in the city in 1922 when he was thirty-seven.

Perhaps he was best known in the city for his work with the United Nations Association, called in some circles Southampton's 'Mr. United Nations'. He founded the local branch of the League of Nations Union in 1924 and as secretary built up membership to over four hundred, making it one of the most successful branches in the country. He established an International Charities shop in the city to raise funds, inaugurated a public speaking competition on the subject of world wide peace in local schools, and started the tradition of a flag raising ceremony at the Civic Centre each year on UN Day. His work was recognised by the national UNA when they awarded him one of the first Anderson Awards of honorary life membership of the United Nations Association. He retired as secretary in 1969 after holding the position for twenty-four years.

Herbert's other interests included hockey and tennis when he was younger, and several of his estates included private tennis courts for the use of residents. He also enjoyed music, playing the cello and piano. His piano at 38 Brookvale Road was a Broadwood for which he designed the case. A lifelong hobby was sketching in watercolours, an interest shared with other members of the family, especially his

brother William who used to accompany him on sketching and painting holidays. A favourite subject was boats and, like his brother Ralph, he was a keen sailor and for many years kept a boat *Dawdler* on the River Hamble. When Peter Whitworth worked for him as an assistant he had to keep his sailing gear at the office, so that when the mood took Herbert he would close the office and they would go off down to Hamble! For many years his personal transport was a 1930s Austin Cambridge with a rather special Tickford Drophead Coupe body, and he continued to drive a car locally up until about a month before his death.

After a short illness, Herbert Collins died on 21 October 1975. The City of Southampton Society, in conjunction with the City Council, instituted a memorial to him on the grassed area in front of his Market Buildings at Swaythling. In 1977 his widow, the late Mrs. Doreen Collins, unveiled a simple plaque there inscribed:

“This place is dedicated to the memory of
Herbert Collins (1885-1975)
Architect and Worker for Peace”

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- D. Code of Practice for the Construction and Maintenance of Tennis Courts,



**The SAPCA Code of Practice
for the Construction and
Maintenance of Tennis Courts**

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The Lawn Tennis Association

The Code of Practice for the Construction and Maintenance of Tennis Courts has been produced in consultation with the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), and is recognised and supported by the LTA for the construction of tennis courts in the UK.

The LTA provides free advice and guidance on tennis facility development. For further information, please contact the LTA on 020 8487 7000.

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The SAPCA Code of Practice for the Construction and Maintenance of Tennis Courts

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Figure 1 Typical cross-section of court construction

2 Section Two – Construction Guidelines

2.1 Site considerations

Selecting the correct site for a court is a major factor in determining not only the costs of construction, but also the quality of the playing experience and the maintenance needs of the court. Where possible, the location of a tennis court should be sympathetic to its surroundings and adjacent infrastructures. Ideally, it will be sited on relatively flat land that is not too close to boundaries or trees. Access should be easy for players (including disabled players) and suitable for maintenance and construction equipment (all courts will require resurfacing at some point; a factor often overlooked).

As most new court developments will require planning consent, advice should be sought at an early stage from the local planning authority to determine whether any restrictions or conditions are likely to be required for the scheme.

Compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act is an obligation for clubs, schools and other organisations. Consideration should be given during the design stages of a project as to how disabled players will be able to use the organisation's courts.

2.2 Dimensions

A tennis court comprises the area within the play lines which is called the Principal Play Area (PPA) and the surrounds or run-offs. The *Rules of Tennis* define the size of the PPA; this is 23.77m x 10.97m. To ensure a satisfactory playing area adequate run-offs are also needed.

For tournament play the ITF and LTA have established recommended and minimum run-offs. For a single court the recommended run-offs are 6.40m at each end and 3.66m on either side. This gives a total court area of 36.57m x 18.29m.

Not all sites are large enough to accommodate the recommended court sizes, so the LTA has also established minimum club court sizes that allow for shorter run-backs and side-runs. These dimensions are 5.49m at both ends and 3.05m on each side – giving an overall court of 34.75m x 17.07m (some further reduction in overall dimensions may be permitted in public parks).

When courts of the same surface type are laid side by side, it is possible to share the side-run between adjacent courts, meaning a smaller overall width is required. Common side-runs should be between 4.27m (LTA recommended) and 3.66m (LTA minimum).

For private courts a minimum size of 33.53m x 16.45m is sometimes used, although better players may find the runback somewhat restricted.



E. Letter from Russell Abrahams, dated 3 April 2025

Our Ref: RMA/KD
Your Ref:

111 Charterhouse Street
London EC1M 6AW

Tel: (020) 7251 3663
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Walter Merricks
18 The Chine
London N10 3PY

BY E-MAIL ONLY

Date: 3rd April 2025

Dear Walter,

A Padel Club for Rookfield

As you will be aware, Pambos Patsalides and I have, for some time, been interested in the opportunity to create a Padel Club at the Cascade Avenue/The Chine area of the Rookfield Estate, on the site of the tennis courts. We think it would be a vibrant and successful offering and it has the capacity to enhance the future of the site and of the immediate area. The Rookfield Garden Village was designed by its original owner-developers the Collins family to have a community sport facility, and that would be a far more appropriate use for the land than it being developed for modern housing that would spoil its century-old heritage.

Padel is one of the fastest growing sports in the UK and the Lawn Tennis Association (the national governing body for padel) recently launched its [strategy for Padel](#). It is a sport for all ages, easy to learn, and a great introductory racquet game for children. I understand that the Collins's were keen to keep up with latest modern trends and we would like to feel that a Padel Club in the open space they designed would meet with their approval!

In January last year I approached the owners, through their former communications agent Henry Lamprecht with whom you put me in touch, expressing my interest in purchasing the land for the purpose of creating a Padel Club but I received no reply or acknowledgement. I contacted him again in August repeating my interest, and Mr Lamprecht replied stating that although he was no longer involved, he knew the owners would be launching an appeal against Haringey's refusal decision – a decision he disparaged as “a slice of Swiss Cheese it has so many holes in it”. I asked him to pass on my interest. I have heard nothing further. Also in August I approached Savills who had previously marketed the site, but received no response. I gained the impression that the owners had no serious intention of releasing the land for leisure use and that they were intent on obtaining the £8-10million that Mr Lamprecht stated it would be worth with planning permission.

Now, a bit of background into GM. GM is a SSAS pension fund, run and managed by our property manager, Keely Durrant and myself. The SSAS is the legal owner of the property, cash and investment assets held by the pension fund. My wife Michelle and I are the beneficial owners of the pension fund assets. The pension fund presently owns 4 Farringdon buildings: 30 St John's Lane, 7 St John Street, 29 Cloth Fair and 111 Charterhouse Street and a warehouse in Luton. The pension fund has no borrowings and also holds cash and other investments. We have sufficient cash assets to purchase the land together with its clubhouse and develop them into a Padel Club and we would be happy to demonstrate our bona fides, as required. Pambos is a practising chartered accountant. I am a practising lawyer and property investor. Together we have sufficient expertise in accounting, finance and construction to enable us to buy the site, investigate best possible noise attenuation available for Padel, apply for planning permission and deliver an operational club.

Pambos and I, having both been squash players when younger, are now incredibly keen Padel players and are familiar with the few Padel facilities that exist in North London. We have a good feeling for the market and the demand for Padel. Many tennis and squash players also love Padel when they can find opportunities to play the game. We were both members of the nearby Coolhurst Tennis and Squash Club which would almost certainly have developed padel facilities on its site if it had the space to do so. Both you and ourselves have excellent contacts with that club.

We would like to see this proposal as of value to the Rookfield community and finding favour with the local residents. We will do what we can to find opportunities for residents who are not familiar with the game to visit Padel facilities and to learn how it could naturally fit in with the environment of the Rookfield Estate, so that the club would be seen as very much as an asset to the community, not as some kind of foreign implant.

We would be more than happy to address any commercial, pastoral or residential concerns that you or your Residents' Association might have. And we would also be willing to address planning and construction issues.

We would of course be unwilling, for all the obvious reasons, to proceed with this expression of interest, if we could not secure from the residents at least initial support for both a planning application and the development of the site into a Padel Club.

You have made it clear to me that the community would be keen to have access to the clubhouse, once it has been refurbished, regardless of whether they are members of the Padel Club. Within certain limitations, that seems to me to be a perfectly reasonable proposition, and we would look forward to discussing ideas that would work best for all concerned.

If any further information from us would assist in your evaluation of this proposal in principle, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me or Pambos.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Russell Abrahams', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

RUSSELL ABRAHAMS

Trustee, for and on behalf of The GM Pension Scheme

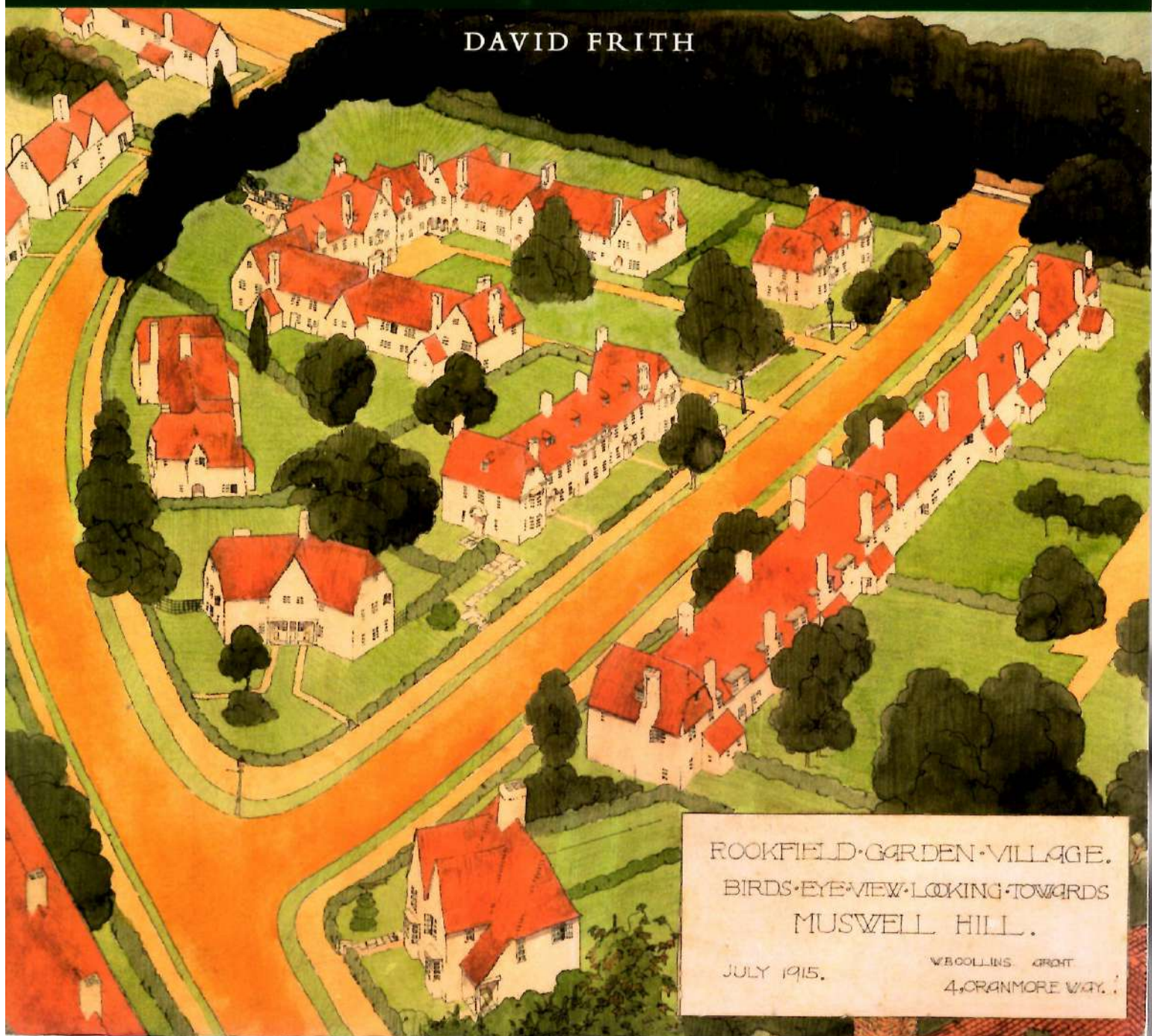


- F. Extracts from Frith, D. 2013 “The Rookfield Estate – Muswell Hill’s Garden Suburb”

THE ROOKFIELD ESTATE

Muswell Hill's Garden Suburb

DAVID FRITH



ROOKFIELD • GARDEN • VILLAGE.
BIRDS • EYE • VIEW • LOOKING • TOWARDS
MUSWELL HILL.

JULY 1915.

W. COLLINS, ARCHT.
4, ORANMORE WAY.

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CHAPTER 2

THE COLLINS FAMILY

In the 1870s the opening of the railways provided easy access to Central London and created a demand for middle class housing in Crouch End and Muswell Hill. At the same time the large estates, which had long been regarded by City merchants as country retreats, were in the light of increased urbanisation becoming less attractive and were placed on the market for residential development. William Jeffries Collins was one of the Victorian entrepreneurs who seized the opportunity to profit from these trends and from a relatively modest beginning he created an impressive property empire. It cannot be said that his career was one of rags to riches as when he was born his father was already established as a book binder and subsequently developed a considerable business. However, in the ten years between 1871 and 1881 W J Collins progressed from apprentice carpenter and joiner to a builder employing 17 men and twenty years later was the master of two of the largest estates in Muswell Hill.

W J Collins was born in January 1856 at 23 Haberdashers Street in Hoxton. His mother was Frances formerly Jeffries. His father Benjamin was described as a Master Book Binder.

In the 1861 Census the family was still living at this address. His father Benjamin was aged 31 and is described as a book binder employing 5 men, 5 boys and 2 girls. His mother, described as Fanny, often used for Frances, was 35 years

old. In addition to William who was 5 at this time, an elder brother Benjamin 6, brothers John and Frank 3 and 1 respectively were also in the house. Further occupants were Sara King 46, a seamstress, William Mulfit 16, a stable boy and William Hudson 18, a compositor.

By the time of the 1871 Census the family had moved to 3 Osborne Villas, Hornsey, and Benjamin now 40 is described as a book binder employing 20 men, 6 boys and 26 females. Frances was 46, Benjamin junior 15 was by now an apprentice book binder and William J, age 15, was an apprentice carpenter and joiner. In addition to the children in 1861 there were now three further children Amelia 7, Arthur 4 and Alice 3.

In August 1879 William J age 23 married Mary Martyn Brannan age 21 of Aden Grove, Stoke Newington. Her father, John Martyn Brannan, although deceased, was described as a builder. The Brannans were an old established Bideford, Devon, family and John was one of several brothers who worked as builders before moving to London. W J Collins's profession is given as a builder and, at the time of his marriage, he still resided at Osborne Villas. The marriage took place at The Green Lanes Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, Stoke Newington.

The 1881 Census shows W J Collins age 25, described as a builder employing 17 men, and his wife setting up home at 98 Florence Road, Hornsey. His wife, Mary Martyn, age 23, and



© Collins Family

Fig. 2.1 *The Collins Family in the grounds of Rookfield. Left to right, William B, Ralph, Herbert (seated on the ground), Mrs. WJ Collins, Ada (seated on the ground), Martyn, WJ Collins, and Ethel.*

Elizabeth Brannan, her mother who lived with them, is described as W J Collins's mother although she was of course his mother-in-law. She was also born in Hoxton. At this time W J Collins's father Benjamin and his mother were living in Mason Terrace, West Green Road, Tottenham. W J Collins's brother Frank, age 21, was living with his parents at this address and is described as a Master Builder employing 26 men and 6 boys. In this decade W J Collins built houses in Ridge Road, Stapleton Hall Road and Oakfield Road in 1882 and 1883, wisely relating his developments to sites in the proximity of the Stapleton Hall Railway Station now long since closed.

W J Collins had six children in all namely: Ada (1881-1969); William Brannan (1883-1977); Herbert (1885-1975); Ethel Mary (1886-1969); Major Martyn (1892-1917) and Ralph Sextus (1893-1972).

By the 1891 Census the Collins family had moved into one of W J Collins's own developments at 92 Stapleton Hall Road. W J Collins age 35 is described as a Builder with no reference to employees. His wife Mary M was 33 and by this time they had four children: Ada 9, William Brannan 7, Herbert 6, Ethel M 4. Eliz. J Brannan 65 was still present and described as

a Retired Builder's widow. They also had two servants Alaze Bromley 22 born in Waterloo and Ethel Yetcoate, 15 nursery maid born in London.

The decade saw a massive extension of W J Collins's activities in Crouch End with a number of substantial developments including houses in Crouch Hill, Ivy Gardens, Christchurch Road, Haslemere Road, Waverley Road, Avenue Road and Elder Avenue. Again all sites were within easy reach of a railway station in this case Crouch End Hill Station. In the final years of the decade he moved his activities up to Muswell Hill and in 1897 submitted plans for Church Crescent and the adjoining houses on Muswell Hill Road. Up to this time in all his submissions to the Hornsey Council (or its predecessor, the Local Board) except one, the plans are signed W J Collins but it is unlikely that he himself was the designer. In the exceptional case W J Collins employed an architect, G A Foster, to design a three storey block of flats at the rear of the houses on Crouch Hill on Vicarage Path. This block was mainly in Islington with a small rear part in Hornsey.

The new century started with the development of the Fortismere Estate. In the previous decade the business had increased to such an extent that by the time of the 1901 Census Collins had acquired not only the Fortismere and the

adjoining Firs Estates but also the Rookfield Estate. The development of the Fortismere Estate had only just started and the big house remained, so pending demolition, the Collins family chose to live in Fortismere, the main house on the estate, an enormous mansion near the corner of Fortis Green and Fortis Green Road. W J Collins's age was 45 and he is described as a Master Builder, his wife Mary M was 43; his daughter Ada 19; sons William Brannan 17, described as a Builder's Assistant; and Herbert 16 described as a Land Surveyor's Assistant. Also two further children: Martyn age 9 and Ralph age 7 who were born in Hornsey. Elizabeth J Brannan, W J Collins's mother-in-law, age 75, born about 1826 was still with them. There were two indoor servants; a housemaid and a cook as well as a gardener and a coachman.

W J Collins' brother Frank also practised as a builder, although not to the same extent as W J, building houses in Talbot Road, Highgate and in Stanhope Road and Stanhope Gardens. For a time W J and Frank were in partnership but in my researches, which only extend to Hornsey, I have found that all work is submitted in their individual names.

The development of the Fortismere Estate proceeded more rapidly than that of the Rookfield Estate so, after demolishing Fortismere House, Collins, by the time of the 1911 Census, had transferred his residence to Rookfield (Fig.2.1). He is now 55 and described as a Builder and landowner. The children had fled the nest, although in two cases not very far. Herbert and Ada were both living in newly built Rookfield Avenue overlooking the grounds of Rookfield. Collins's mother-in-law had probably died by this time so the only family was his wife Mary Martyn. They had three servants Ellen Greenham 28 Cook b. Merriott, Somerset, Percy George Taylor 28 Servant/Gardener b. Bromley and his

wife Caroline Charlotte Taylor 25 Servant b. N. Cray.

In 1911 the two younger sons Major Martyn and Ralph Sixtus were living in a boarding house in Southampton at 9 Cranbury Crescent. Martyn, 18 was described as a builder's apprentice and Ralph 17 as an apprentice marine motor engineer. Purely coincidentally, William Brannan Collins, described as an architect, was visiting Southampton on Census day and staying at this address. His home in London at this time is not known.

Both William and Herbert attended Mill Hill School between the ages of 14 and 16 as boarders at School House. Although they both showed considerable talent at art they were not allowed to continue their education, leaving at the age of 16, when their father put them to work in the building business. They started at the bottom, like their father, working alongside his men as carpenters. William is quoted as saying, "In Church Crescent my father built the houses and he thought that I should learn how to use some of the carpenter's tools and I had to fix the chair rails (dado) round the corners and elsewhere."⁸ As can be seen in the 1901 Census they were fully engaged in the building business at the ages of 17 and 16 respectively. While working in this way during the day they both studied at evening courses and Herbert obtained a number of City and Guilds certificates in carpentry and brickwork and they both studied architecture. W J Collins seems to have had very definite ideas about the school leaving age, writing a long letter on the subject to the *Hornsey Journal* in 1935 which also indicates a continuing interest in Hornsey.⁹

Although both the brothers became skilled architects only Herbert (1885-1975) formally qualified, studying part-time at the Architectural Association and becoming a Licentiate of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) in

⁸ Interview with David Jones. Quoted in Whitehead *The Growth of Muswell Hill* 1995, p.134

⁹ *Hornsey Journal*, 10th January 1935 p.10. After noting that a Home Office report had stated that 33% of house and shop breakage offences were committed by youths under 16 years of age W J Collins commented, "I disagree entirely with our educational authorities, who are extending the elementary school leaving age to 15 years. At the age of 14 we take, as it were, the first step towards manhood, and it is unfitting that the average youth should be kept at the school of his infancy after that time. Certainly his education must continue, and for that purpose I suggest that there will be nothing more suitable than a year or so in an agricultural school if he has not found employment within one month of leaving school." He went on to commend the German model that was in operation at that time.



Fig. 2.2 W J Collins in a 10hp Wolsley in Southampton circa 1925.

1925, an Associate in 1926 and a Fellow in 1940. Herbert's career, which extended until he was 90, has been well documented by Robert Williams¹⁰ and his work includes a large number of housing schemes in the Southampton area some of which were held up by the Ministry of Health in 1939 as examples to be followed. He was a friend of Ebenezer Howard, the author of *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* and the first protagonist of the Garden City movement. For two years, 1924 – 1926, Herbert served as a director of Welwyn Garden City and his interest in town planning is indicated by the fact that he became a member of the Town Planning Institute in 1926 and a Fellow in 1941. His work, which is equal to that of a number of his contemporaries who received greater prominence, has not had the national recognition that it deserves, possibly due to the fact that much of it was financed by his family and the distinction between his role as architect and that as developer was not always clear, a relationship which was not entirely in accordance with the ethos of the RIBA at that time. Herbert married firstly in September 1909 Annie Squire Holman (Fig. 5.1) who died in 1942 and secondly, Doreen in April 1944 whom it is said he met at a local branch of the League of Nations Union. They

had two children Julie and Nigel.

W J Collins (Fig. 2.2) left Muswell Hill shortly after 1911 to live in Southampton in a house designed by his son William and left the development of his Muswell Hill Estates to his sons. W J Collins soon became an established member of the community in Southampton and was noted for his philanthropy. For a time he served on the Southampton Town Council, as a Parish Councillor and a member of the Court of Governors of Southampton University. He was also a member of the Rotary Club. His gifts included land for a hospital and the erection of twelve bungalows which were let to old age pensioners at a nominal rent. In memory of his son Martyn (see page 20), shortly after the First World War, he donated £10,000 to the Boys' and Girls' Life Brigade Companies of Southampton and a similar sum for the creation of a ward at the Royal Northern Hospital in London. He was a member of the Baptist Church and before moving to Southampton, he had worshipped at the Church in Ferme Park Road, Crouch End. Continuing his association, he made substantial contributions to the Church, both locally and nationally, and it is said that largely due to his generosity several new Churches were erected in

¹⁰ *Herbert Collins 1885-1975* by Robert Williams, Paul Cave Publications Ltd, In conjunction with the City of Southampton Society 1985



Fig. 2.3 *W J Collins in later years.*

Southampton. W J Collins died on 16th May 1939 leaving an estate of £530,841.14s.10d. (Fig. 2.3) W B Collins founded Rookfield Garden Village in 1913 and Herbert who lived in No.31 Rookfield Avenue eventually also moved to Southampton in 1922 (Fig. 2.4).

W J Collins's daughter Ada (1881-1969) married Ebenezer Cunningham in July 1908, who in 1911, was Professor of Mathematics at London University and subsequently returned as a Fellow to his former college St. John's, Cambridge. In 1911 they were living at No. 9 Rookfield Avenue as neighbours of Herbert.

W J Collins's younger daughter, Ethel (1886 - 1969), linked two building dynasties by marrying in June 1907 William Metherell, the son of a

fellow builder Richard Metherell whose career had closely followed that of W J Collins. Richard Metherell, the son of a farmer in Hartland, Devon, was apprenticed to a carpenter and joiner in his teens and after working in Devon moved to London to seek his fortune. In the 1881 Census he is described as a carpenter and lived in Everleigh Street Islington. After working for other builders he was soon promoted to looking after important work in the City and West End. He then formed his own company and moved into property development and developed a number of estates in Muswell Hill including houses in Muswell Hill Road, Woodland Rise and Woodland Gardens. By 1901 he had moved his residence from Ridge Road in Hornsey where he lived in 1891 to the mansion Elmscott in Green Dragon Lane, Southgate. In 1906 he bought the Old Park Grange Estate from Lord Currie and developed the Grange Park Estate.¹¹ The daughter of William and Ethel, Mary Janet, married Clifford Pomfret and their son, David, is still concerned with the management of the Collins's estates in London and elsewhere.



Fig. 2.4 *William B and Herbert in the garden of Herbert's house in Southampton.*

¹¹ Grange Park - a short history, Grange Park Residents' Association Website.

William Brannan Collins (1883-1977) (Fig. 2.5) remained in London, completed the Rookfield Estate and designed and built a number of other housing developments including blocks of flats. In September 1912 he married Edith Hope Lebon and built a house for himself, "West View" in Sheldon Avenue, Highgate (Fig. 2.7). He had no children. He continued to manage the Muswell Hill estates from his small estate office in half a shop in Firs Parade, Fortis Green Road. He took a close interest in the Rookfield Estate and was active to just before his death and was well known to and liked by the residents. W B Collins was an extremely competent architect and it is certainly no reflection of his ability that he did not have formal qualifications. His papers show that he had an exceptional knowledge of building as well as outstanding design ability. He was also an accomplished artist and produced a number of watercolour paintings. The Architects (Registration) Act of 1931 placed certain restrictions on the use of the title 'Architect' and it is my opinion that W B did not wish to bother with formally qualifying or registering since all his practice was developing the family estates. However, I found in the RIBA Drawing Collection a delightful water colour of the Rookfield Garden Village dated 1915 which is proudly signed "Designed by W B Collins, Architect."¹² After Rookfield W. B. went on to design flats in Fortis Green and houses in Twyford Avenue, Eastern Road, Rhodes Avenue and elsewhere. It is beyond the scope of this study to attempt a complete list of the Collins's work in Hornsey; sufficient to say that in the 60 years between 1880 and 1940 the Collins's, father and sons, between them covered a substantial part of the old Borough of Hornsey with buildings of a very high quality.

The sixth child of W J Collins was Ralph Sextus who, in the 1911 Census, was described as an apprentice marine motor engineer. He served in the Royal Navy during the First World War in M.T.Boats and was stationed in Southern Italy. Ralph did not follow the profession to which he was apprenticed, instead he reverted to family



© Collins Family

Fig. 2.5 W B Collins 1946

tradition and became a builder in Southampton. He retired to Milford-on-Sea in 1946 and later Keyhaven where he devoted his time to sailing and took great pleasure in helping anyone learning to sail. He was described, in an appreciation in the local paper, as 'a solitary sort of person, immune to luxury and comfort, someone with a rock-like quality.'¹³

Finally, mention should be made of the third of W J Collins' sons – Major Martyn who did not survive to take part in the family firm. Major was his forename not his rank.

Major Martyn Collins was born in March 1892, and following in the family tradition was educated at Mill Hill School from 1906 to December 1908. He enlisted in October 1914 as an Ordinary Seaman RNVR (Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve) and in March 1915 was commissioned as a Temporary Sub



Fig. 2.6 Major Martyn Collins.

¹² RIBA Drawing Library Drawings and Archives Collection PA 986/1. This is shown on the front cover of this book.

¹³ *Lynton Times* 28 October 1972.

CHAPTER 3

THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE ROOKFIELD ESTATE¹⁴

The first thing a developer wants to do when buying a large area of land is to realise some profit from it. For this purpose a good idea is to develop sites that can be used without constructing new streets. The Rookfield Estate, which on the very first proposals was known as the Avenue House Estate, had road frontages on Muswell Hill, St. James Lane and Park Road. Therefore Collins's first thoughts were of these frontages (Fig. 3.1). While still considering the remainder of the

estate, a number of proposals were put forward for building on these sites. For example the Council approved in March 1901 eleven houses in St. James Lane and 26 on Muswell Hill. The more intensive development of the Muswell Hill frontage was abandoned, possibly because of the difficult levels, and eventually the nine houses which were built between Rookfield and Cascade Avenues and St. James Lane were approved in July 1901 (Fig. 4.1 in Chapter 4). In September 1903 the Council

approved seven shops with flats over in Park Road five of which, known as Carlton Mansions, were south of Etheldene Avenue (Figs. 3.3 & 3.4). These were destroyed by enemy action during the Second World War and the site is now occupied by Dale Court. Carlton Mansions were of a similar design to the remaining block, now occupied on the Ground Floor by Prickett and Ellis, on the other side of Etheldene Avenue.

The proposals for St. James Lane were modified,

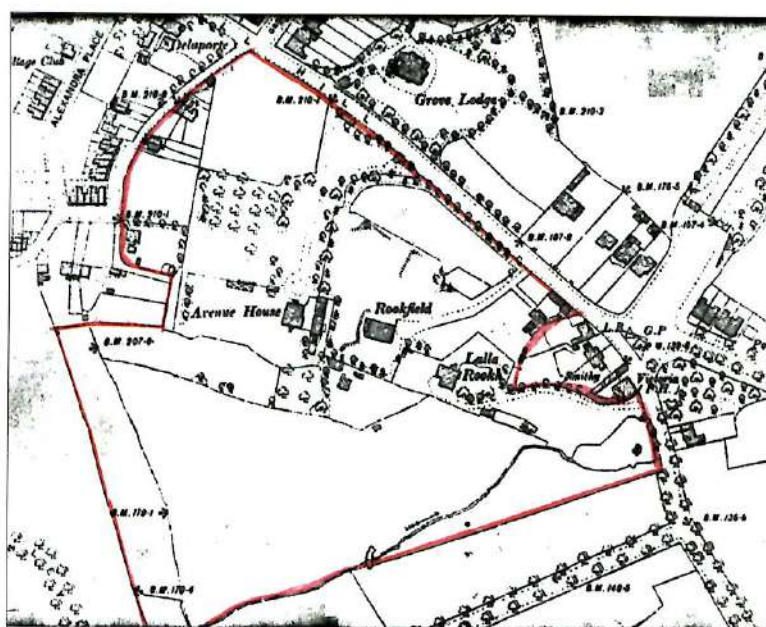


Fig. 3.1 Extract of 1894 Ordnance Survey showing the land acquired by W.J. Collins in 1899.

¹⁴ Most of the information in this Chapter is derived from the Minute Books of first, the Hornsey Urban District Plans Committee Minute Book 3 1900-1903; then the Hornsey Borough Plans Committee Minute Books 1 to 5 covering the period 1903 to 1928.



Fig. 3.2 Rookfield Avenue Stage 1. First six houses approved 1906. 2 Type A, 2 Type B and 2 Type C.

probably when it was realised that ground conditions would not permit continuous parallel terraces on both St. James Lane and Cascade Avenue. It was therefore decided to front the houses that could be built, The Court, on this site onto Cascade Avenue and set them back forming a green on the land that could not be developed. The development of St James Lane was limited to Manor Farm Cottages which dates from 1903 and two blocks of four flats (Nos. 118 to 124 and Nos. 126 to 132), which although on land that was part of the estate bought by Collins, were designed by FF Lester for JT Burr and approved in 1910 (Figs.

4.5, 4.6 in Chapter 4). The history of these sites is somewhat confusing. The two houses containing four flats that constitute Nos. 118 to 124 St James Lane were approved on 20 June 1910 as part of a larger scheme of "13 domestic dwellings each containing two separate dwellings" As only two of these were built it appears that Collins, when working out the proposals mentioned above for The Court, took back from J T Burr the site for the 11 dwellings. The smaller two storey block of two flats Nos. 114/116, of a similar design to the houses in Cascade Avenue, was built by Herbert Collins in 1914 (Fig. 4.7).



Fig. 3.3 The first development in 1903/5. 205/209 Park Road.



© Courtesy of Nick Pullan

Fig. 3.4 Submitted drawings for Carlton Mansions similar to existing 205/209 Park Road. Destroyed by war damage and now the site of Dale Court

I doubt whether Collins had an accurate survey with heights and contours before he started designing the layout, as many of the early proposals pay little regard to the configuration and levels of the site or the existence of trees. It is an unusual characteristic of the Estate that its development, which shows frequent changes of plan, was carried out over a period of nearly forty years from start to finish showing the lack of an initial overall concept for the design. During the early period a number of layouts were considered and refused by the Council, but as no reasons are given and the plans are not available it is not clear from the Council Minutes why they were refused. This was before the days of planning control and the Council's remit concerned mainly enforcing the building Bye-laws which covered in great detail the type of construction of buildings and the materials to be used. Requirements were laid down on details such as the height of rooms, the space about dwellings and the type of drainage. Bye-laws dictated the width of foundations but do not seem to lay down any requirement to investigate the load bearing capacity of the sub-soil. Street widths and detailed surface design were specified but I can see no specifications for road construction. It is important to remember that, while the Council controlled building by means of the Bye-laws, they had little control over the type of houses to be erected, or the siting and design, or indeed whether a site should be developed or not. The powers to preserve trees and open space were many years ahead. However, within the limits available to them, Hornsey which achieved Borough status in 1903, were very particular about the quality of the housing within their district.

Cranley Gardens was laid out by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners before W J Collins acquired the Rookfield Estate. He acquired the land on the north side of Cranley Gardens between the church site and The Chine and in developing this site in 1901/2 was able to rationalise the southern boundary of the Estate along the line of the rear boundaries of these houses. Etheldene Avenue, with the culverted tributary of the Moselle Brook running under the road, followed parallel to the line of Cranley Gardens and was a common

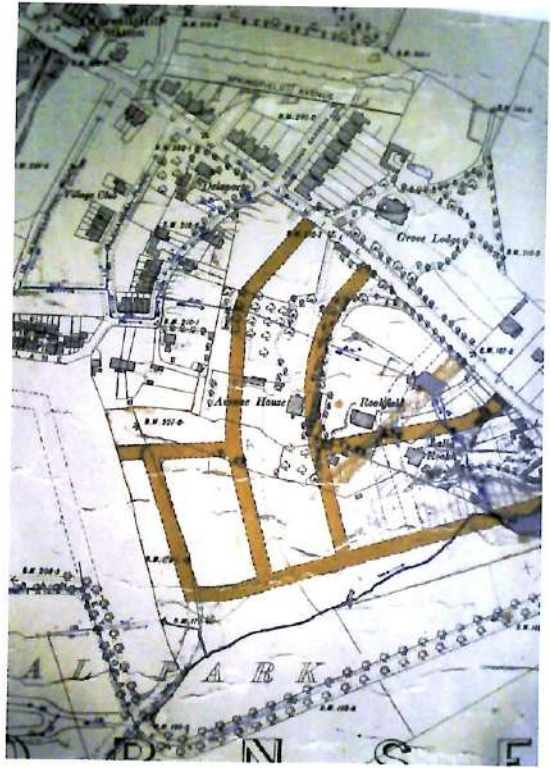


Fig. 3.5 This first draft layout shows two alternative lines for Cranmore Way and a possible third avenue parallel to Rookfield Avenue.

feature in all future draft layouts. Collins in 1903 was also able to buy a further strip of land from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to construct a road that connected Etheldene Avenue to Cranley Gardens. After several attempts the Council finally approved Chine Road, as it was then known, in July 1903.

The first attempts at a layout consisted of two parallel roads roughly following the western boundary of the site and linking to Etheldene Avenue at the south (Fig. 3.5). The roads were so spaced as to allow plots of approximately 100 feet depth and they were first set out in unbroken terraces with the frontage of each house being approximately 22 feet. For part of its length Rookfield Avenue followed the boundary between Avenue House and Rookfield. This type of layout is similar to that adopted by Collins on the Fortismere estate where, with little regard to natural features or levels, the roads are set out in parallel lines with 100 feet deep plots and 45 feet wide streets. This early plan would have resulted in, for example, seven more houses than were

built on the west side of Rookfield Avenue and eighteen more on the east side, although many of the plots indicated on the east side would have been incapable of reasonable development due to the levels of the ground. The initial proposals showed Cranmore Way, then known as Grove Avenue, parallel to Etheldene Avenue, divided on both sides into plots with a frontage of 22 feet. However the shape of the Rookfield Estate and its varying levels did not lead to a simple regular solution. The area east of Rookfield Avenue presented many problems of levels and was left unresolved on the early plans.¹⁵

After the initial development of the frontages the next stages were the beginning of Etheldene Avenue and Rookfield Avenue. Plans for both roads started to be submitted at the beginning of 1906. The west side of Rookfield Avenue was leased by W J Collins to his younger son Herbert for 99 years from 1906 and, although the last houses on this side were not completed until 1911, all the leases ran from 1906. The plans for these houses were submitted in the name of Herbert & Co. or signed by Herbert Collins. The first two blocks of six and four houses (Nos. 1 to 19) were approved

in 1906. The first ten houses consisted of three types: Type A, B and C. Type A is the end of terrace house which is built, with slight variations, at Nos. 1, 11, 13 and 19. Type B is a double-fronted house which appears at Nos. 3, 5 and 17 with Type C making up the remainder Nos. 7, 9 and 15 (Figs. 3.2, 3.7. & 3.8). The 12 houses in two blocks of six (Nos. 21 to 43) were approved in February 1909. For eight of these houses a new design of terraced house Type D was produced. The approved plans show the design used in Nos. 23 to 29 but not the elevations used for Nos. 35 to 41. The Type A end houses were again used at Nos. 21, 31, 33 and 43. In the later submission Herbert tried to persuade the Council that they did not need fresh plans as Type A had already been approved in 1906 but he was made to submit fresh drawings for this scheme (Figs. 3.9, 3.10 & 3.11). No 33 is unique in that it has a garden extending into Cascade Avenue. Before the houses in Cascade Avenue were built this plot was sold to Mr. E. Burden for garden use only. Part of the site is now occupied by an electricity substation. The two cottages on the east side of Rookfield Avenue (Nos. 12 & 14) were approved in May 1910 (Fig. 3.12).



Fig. 3.6 Rookfield Avenue circa 1912.

¹⁵ A detailed plan of the first layout showing individual houses is held in the RIBA Drawing Collection. A 986.



Fig. 3.7 Rookfield Avenue Stage 1 - Two Type B houses and one Type C.

The first part of Etheldene Avenue was approved between 1906 and 1908 (Figs. 3.13 & 3.15). The first houses approved in 1906 were of two types A and B (Fig. 3.17), both types had a three storey section at the rear with one room at second floor level. Type A had a gable extending to first floor level with a battered buttress, a cellar access from within the house and a bathroom at second floor level. Type B had a gable stopping at eaves level and a cellar access from a door at the front of the house approached by steps down from the front garden level, with a bedroom at the upper level. These houses were similar in design to the early houses in Rookfield Avenue, although on a smaller frontage, and were repeated with considerable variations in

the elevation on both the north and south side of Etheldene Avenue. On the north side the houses were built in two blocks of ten with a gap on the site of No. 21 which had been left to give access to the land at the rear in the event of the land being sold separately. The plans to fill in this gap were approved in July 1908 but presumably the house was not built until the proposal to sell Rookfield had been abandoned. On the south side these two types were used for Nos. 2 to 30, although Nos. 20 to 30 have been replaced as a result of war damage, and the replacements were designed not by Collins, but by a separate firm of architects in a style different from the original. The next houses Type C (Nos. 32 to 58) on the south side have



Fig. 3.8 Rookfield Avenue Stage 1. Type A and Type C.



Fig. 3.9 Rookfield Avenue Stage 2. Type D.



Fig. 3.13 Etheldene Avenue. Two houses showing elevations A & B.

boundaries. However this Act obviously had an influence on the younger Collins's who clearly were aware of the developments in the Garden City movement in Letchworth. In October 1910 plans were submitted to the Council for "laying out part of the Rookfield Estate on Garden City Lines according to the provisions of the Town Planning Act 1909". These were submitted by W J Collins and disapproved. Unfortunately the plans are not available so it is not possible to say exactly what the proposals were, but subsequent decisions indicate that the main causes of concern were the retention of trees, road widths and grass verges. Although it is not particularly to do with the Garden City idea, one of W B Collins's aims was that Hornsey should allow party walls to stop at roof level below the tiles and not, as required by the Bye-laws, project as parapets above tile level. William and Herbert would have seen rows of cottages at Letchworth where this was not a requirement. Clearly the continuous roof line of a row of houses is more aesthetically pleasing than a roof broken up by projecting party walls and

would also save building costs. However, Hornsey were not prepared to budge, on this or other occasions. This requirement was not removed until the Bye-laws were revised in 1923.¹⁶ The difference can be seen clearly on the later houses on the Estate. It appears that the Council was also asked to allow the design of Rookfield Avenue to be modified, presumably to allow the mature trees, which at that time were mainly elms, to be retained on the eastern side.

The minute reads: *The Committee had before them a letter from W B Collins in regard to laying out the Rookfield Estate on Garden City lines.*¹⁷ *The Committee were of the opinion that the schemes set forth in the letter did not come under the Town Planning Act and they were therefore not prepared to consent to the omission of parapet walls or the laying out of Rookfield Avenue other than in accordance with the approved plan. 30 January 1911.*

The decision that the road must be laid out in accordance with the approved plan meant a continuous width of 45 feet. Although the properties were set out to this width, the road was

¹⁶The purpose of extending the party walls above roof level was to prevent the spread of fire between terraced properties. This was a requirement in most parts of England but special dispensation was obtained to allow the early houses in Hampstead Garden Suburb to be constructed without such extensions. W B Collins commented that the devices he had used to mask or divert attention from these eyesores within Rookfield Garden Village were gables with the apex filled with concrete, chimney stacks at the front, dormer windows and a parapet continued along the front of the house.

¹⁷The objective of the Garden City movement as propounded by Ebenezer Howard was to build towns of such a size and in such a manner that all inhabitants could have ready access to open country side in addition to the advantages of town life. The first Garden City was started at Letchworth in 1906. While certain aspects of the Rookfield Estate, spacious development, relatively low densities and communal open space, are characteristics of a garden city it is hardly a concept that could be applied to a limited site within a rapidly developing urban area. In an article in Bulletin 29, 1988 of the Hornsey Historical Society, Anne Trevett analyses the Garden City movement and concludes that when measuring Rookfield against Howard's proposals the most cursory glance indicates that Rookfield is very far from Garden City ideals. Commenting on a draft of her paper in which she said that Rookfield had no philanthropic basis, which was one of the elements of the Garden City movement, W B Collins said "I was not in a position to be philanthropic. It took several years to pay off the bank overdraft etc." Although W B Collins died some years before this article was published, he had read the first draft.

only constructed to this width up to the junction of Cranmore Way and for a short length opposite Nos. 2 to 8 Rookfield Avenue. One of Collins's requests was for the Council to lower the sewer in Muswell Hill, which was not well received. At the same meeting the Council agreed a widening of Muswell Hill opposite the Estate which permitted the trees, which at that time were within the boundary of Rookfield, to be retained within the footway subject to Collins undertaking to indemnify the Council against certain costs. This is the reason for the wide planted beds on the Hill with the footpath behind. Unfortunately the trees no longer exist. The decisions of the Council are not surprising as the Town Planning Act of 1909, while it provided certain powers the Council could adopt, did not have the sort of implications that the Collins brothers attached to it.

The development continued and in February 1911 the Council approved the remaining 8 houses on the south side of Etheldene Avenue (Nos. 74 to 88). The plans, although not signed, were beautifully drawn and obviously by W B Collins (Figs. 3.19, 4.5) It is in this scheme that W

B Collins first used his half-hipped gable which he used in later developments in the Rookfield Garden Village. The first 6 houses with a similar design in The Chine Road were approved in June of that year (Fig. 3.22). The tennis pavilion in Cascade Avenue, on the courts which originally extended to Etheldene Avenue, was approved at the beginning of 1912.

At this time the Collins's must have become so frustrated with the failure of the Council to appreciate their proposals for what they termed "Garden City Lines" that they decided to sell the remainder of the Estate rather than develop it themselves. So on 25 March 1912 Rookfield together with 5 acres was offered for sale by Prickett & Ellis at the Mart, Tokenhouse Yard, EC. The house was described as '*A Handsome Red-Brick Residence*' comprising 9 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, 3 reception rooms etc. within twenty minutes motor ride to the West End. In addition to the usual servants' accommodation, kitchens and cellars there was also detached stabling. The property had over 1,100 feet¹⁸ of road frontage ripe for immediate development or the whole

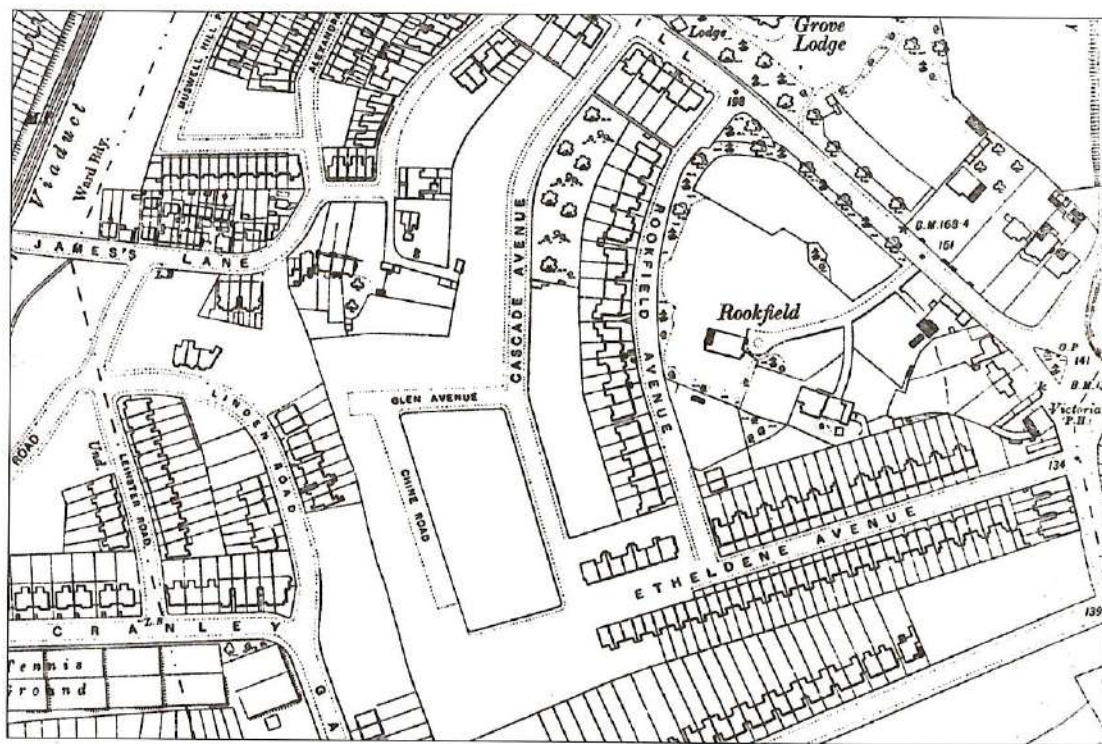


Fig. 3.14 Extract of 1913 Ordnance Survey Map showing the Rookfield Estate in 1912.

¹⁸ While it is true that there was over 1,100 feet of road frontage, this was on Muswell Hill and Rookfield Avenue and owing to the levels of the site very little of these frontages could have been developed without considerable difficulty.



Fig. 3.15 Etheldene Avenue North side.

could be dealt with as a building estate for the erection of medium sized houses and flats for which there was a good demand. There was also a small plot of land 19ft. 6 inches wide affording access to Etheldene Avenue (site of No. 21) (Fig. 3.18).

In spite of its attractions Rookfield was not sold so they turned their attention once again to the Council. In November of that year plans submitted for laying out the remainder of the Estate as a "Garden Village" were refused and the Committee emphasised that they could not recommend any departure from the Bye-laws. Early in 1913 W J Collins wrote to the Council "I understand that negotiations with my son W B

Collins for the development of 5 or 6 acres as a garden village have come to deadlock owing to your desire to do away with the trees in Rookfield Avenue and your retaining the right to deal with the trees within the fence on Muswell Hill." He said he could not agree to any tree being removed and put their value to his estate at £3000 and said he would take counsel's opinion.

In March 1913 fifteen houses in Cascade Avenue (Nos. 1 to 29) and 2 in Glen Avenue (now Nos. 55 & 57 The Chine), the only houses in that road with party walls projecting beyond the roof, were approved (Figs. 3.20, 3.21, 3.25 & 3.26). The 5 houses in The Court and the odd 2 flats in St James Lane, which look like a house in Cascade Avenue,



Fig. 3.16 Etheldene Avenue South side houses with basement kitchens (Nos. 32 to 58).

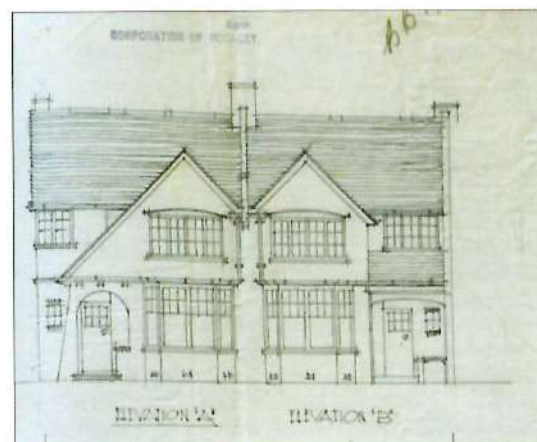


Fig. 3.17 Original drawing of the alternative elevations of the first 29 houses in Etheldene Avenue. Approved 1906.

were approved in February 1914; these were all designed by Herbert Collins (Fig. 3.27). The plans of the houses in The Court as submitted failed to show the party wall extended above tile level. These were refused and subsequent amendments made freehand and initialled "HC under protest" were made to indicate the party walls extended before the plans were approved.

In February 1913 Herbert wrote to the *Hornsey Journal*. To the Editor,

'It will probably interest your readers to learn that there is a movement afoot to obtain certain alterations in our existing by-laws concerning the construction of private roads in Hornsey - i.e. all roads not being main thoroughfares. And I think most people will say such an alteration will not be before it is needed.'

The Council has been approached with the suggestion that they should approve the construction of private roads with the introduction of grass edgings, four feet wide on both sides of the carriageway, with trees planted intermittently thereon; it was also suggested that the carriageway should not exceed twenty feet in width, and that anything wider is a waste of public money. (Existing by-laws stipulate that the carriageway of a 45ft road must be 27ft at least)

The Council has, so far, intimated that it cannot approve the proposal, because, it does not conform to the existing by-laws, and I therefore wish to submit that it is high time these laws were altered. I cannot believe that the thoughtful and artistic people of Hornsey (who, I think, are in the majority) are content with the present method of constructing roads, for it surely must be agreed that, with very few exceptions these private roads are most monotonous, and I do not know of any good reason why we should not have something much better.

It is a great pity that the Council are not more progressive in this direction; they are content to continue forming roads in the same old out-of-date manner, clinging to the antique by-laws, and this in spite of the fact that the Local Government Board have recently circularised all local authorities that the by-laws require revision periodically. I can only think it is owing to the quite inconsiderable amount of trouble and expense which would be involved that the Council defer their action, but I venture to say that the matter needs immediate attention.

It is fairly obvious to me that the by-laws have never

These Particulars will admit to View.

FOR OCCUPATION OR DEVELOPMENT.

Suitable for Residential Estate, Home or Institution.

"Rookfield,"

MUSWELL HILL, N.

Five minutes from Station; one minute from Electric Trams; twenty minutes' motor ride to Town.

Particulars and Conditions of Sale

OF THE ABOVE

VALUABLE

Freehold Property

COMPRISING

HANDSOME RED-BRICK RESIDENCE,

WITH

STABLING AND GROUNDS of about

FIVE ACRES,

WITH OVER

1,100 feet frontage.

RIPE FOR DEVELOPMENT.

Which will be sold by Auction by

MESSRS.

PRICKETT & ELLIS,

AT THE MART, TOKENHOUSE YARD, E.C.,

On **MONDAY, MARCH 25th, 1912,**

At TWO o'clock precisely.

(Unless previously sold by Private Treaty.)

Solicitor— WILLIAM COOPER, Esq.,
93 & 94, Chancery Lane, W.C.

Auctioneers' Offices—
4, High Street, Highgate Hill, N.;
Highgate Station (G.N. Ry.), Archway Road, N.; and
57, CHANCERY LANE, W.C.

Telephones: (HOLBORN 4930. HORNSEY 254. Established 1767.

4574 186/1492

Fig. 3.18 Sale particulars for the sale of Rookfield 1912.

been revised from an artistic standpoint, which is much to our discredit.

If any of your readers would like to support the movement, I should be glad to hear from them. Herbert Collins, 31 Rookfield Avenue. February 24 1913'

There is no evidence that Herbert's exhortations led to a popular uprising and the Bye-laws on street widths remained more or less the same when they were amended in 1923. In November 1913 Herbert put forward proposals for the laying out of Cascade Avenue which the Council



Fig. 3.19 Etheldene Avenue 74 to 88. Approved 1911. The first time that W B Collins had designed a half-hipped gable.

were unable to accept. Unfortunately I cannot find out what was proposed and why they were unacceptable, but in the light of the above, the reasons are probably self evident. Cascade Avenue is laid out to the width required by the Bye-laws but Rookfield Avenue and Cranmore Way fail to comply. Failing to obtain any concessions on the Bye-laws the Collins's must have decided to abandon any intention to construct the roads to the standard necessary for subsequent adoption by the Council. Why Rookfield Avenue and Cranmore Way were left in such a poor state is not clear. Around this time W J Collins moved to Southampton and left the development of the Muswell Hill Estates to his two sons. In spite of

the Council's intransigence the development continued and Rookfield Garden Village Ltd was created on 28 August 1913 with W B Collins as the sole director. On assuming control W B Collins gave fresh consideration to the way in which the remainder of the Estate could be developed. From his papers it is clear that he had an accurate survey with heights and contours made of the site and designed Rookfield Close and the re-aligned Cranmore Way in a way that paid more respect to the levels of the site. He also decided to abandon the previous ideas of continuous terraces in Cascade Avenue and The Chine.

Nos. 2 to 8 Rookfield Ave were approved and No. 10 (the 'Butterfly' plan with No. 18 Cranmore



Fig. 3.20 Part of 1 to 29 Cascade Avenue.



Fig. 3.21 Date plaque on 1 to 29 Cascade Avenue.



Fig. 3.22 *The Chine 1 to 11 approved 1911, showing a half-hipped gable.*

Way) in June and July 1913 (Figs. 3.23, 3.24 & 3.30). In September 1913 the Council approved a group of 17 houses on the south side of Cranmore Way, which at that time was called Grove Avenue. The plans are signed by W B Collins and his address given as Rookfield Avenue. This is a design that was not built and shows two house types one with a much wider frontage than is now evident in the street. The houses formed an attractive composition with a central gable with a plaque similar to the design of the flats in Rookfield Close (Fig. 3.28). Owing to the absence of a block plan, it is not clear whether this scheme relates to the originally proposed line of Cranmore Way or its position as built. The scheme

as constructed with 19 houses was approved later in the year (Figs. 3.29, 3.31 & 3.32). There are several different house types in this row, with four houses having wider frontages than the remainder. Several houses have dormer windows and others have half-hipped gables on the front elevation.

What is the grandest architectural composition on the estate, the north side of Cranmore Way (Nos. 2 to 16), was designed by W B Collins in the early part of 1914 (Figs. 3.33, 3.34 & 3.35) and from that time all applications were made in the name of Rookfield Garden Village Ltd. The proposals for Rookfield Close, fourteen houses and six flats, were approved later in 1914 (Figs. 3.36, 3.37 & 3.42). Although W B Collins was

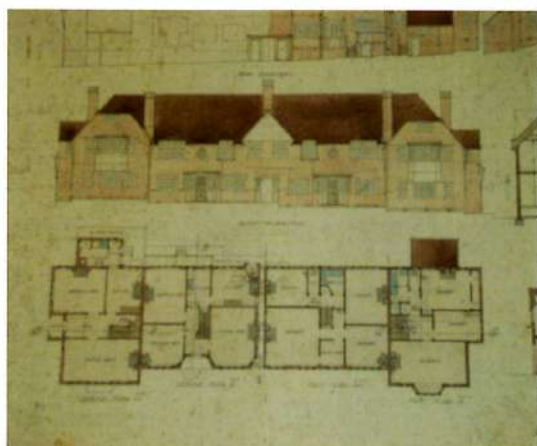


Fig. 3.23 *Original drawings for 2 to 8 Rookfield Avenue.*



Fig. 3.24 *2 to 8 Rookfield Avenue approved 1913.*



Fig. 3.25 1 to 29 Cascade Avenue 1913.



Fig. 3.26 55 & 57 The Chine 1913, the last houses built with party walls projecting above the roof.



Fig. 3.27 The Court, Cascade Avenue 1914.

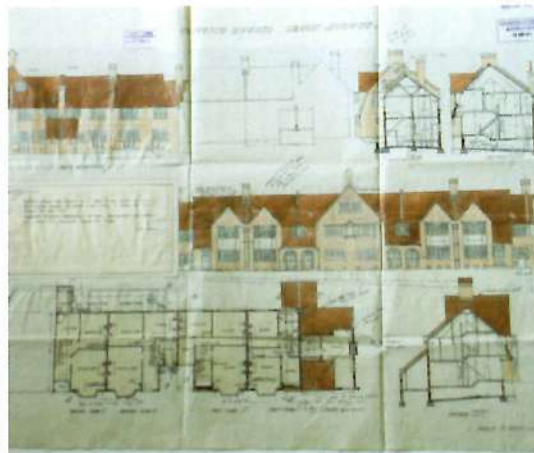


Fig. 3.28 Plans for the south side of Cranmore Way approved but not built.



Fig. 3.29 Cranmore Way South side. 1913/1914.



Fig. 3.30 10 Rookfield Avenue and 18 Cranmore Way "Butterfly" plan houses 1913.

not permitted to dispense with projecting party walls, he nevertheless, produced an outstanding architectural composition. A plaque on the wall of the flats in Rookfield Close gives the date 1915.

With the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 the Collins's concentrated on completing the stages of the estate that had already been approved. Probably owing to the shortage of manpower and materials during wartime there was a lull in their activities. As far as is known neither William nor Herbert served in the War. In 1915 W J Collins wrote a letter to the *Hornsey Journal* in which he offered to let, for the duration of the war, the vacant land on the Estate at a

nominal rent for the purpose of growing kitchen produce.¹⁹

With the coming of peace the first plans approved in 1920/21 were for the completion of the west side and the remaining houses on the north side of The Chine. This development shows the first three examples (Nos. 13-19; 29-35 & 37-43) of the block of four houses designed by W B Collins with a passage way through the centre of the block which became a template for the later houses on the Estate (Fig. 3.41). Some of the plans of the four house blocks show a very quirky way of splitting the party wall over the central passage in order to achieve symmetrical fenestration.



Fig. 3.31 Cranmore Way South side.



Fig. 3.32 Cranmore Way South side.

¹⁹ *Hornsey Journal* 6 October 1915.



Fig. 3.33 *Cranmore Way North side 1914.*

The completion of The Chine and Cascade Avenue took place in 1924/25. The three blocks of four houses on the east side of Cascade Avenue (Nos. 18-24; 26-32; 34-40) together with a block of two houses (Nos. 42 & 44) and a block of five (Nos. 46-54) were approved in March 1925. At the southern end of this row W B Collins departed from his usual blocks of four houses. This is because, having sold a plot to extend the garden of No. 33 Rookfield Avenue, there was insufficient room after No. 40 for two blocks of four. Instead he built a semi-detached pair (Nos. 42 & 44) and a block of five houses (Nos. 46-54). The centre house of the block of five was rewarded with a balcony overlooking the tennis courts (Fig. 3.44). These

houses were finally approved together as there was the need to reach agreement on their drainage. However it is likely that many of the houses were completed and occupied before this approval date. Kelly's Directory for 1925 shows Nos. 10 to 38 Cascade Avenue fully occupied. The blocks are designed with the end houses set back so that the height of the houses can be varied to follow the slope of the ground (Fig. 3.43). The two blocks of four on the west side of Cascade Avenue (Nos. 31-37) and one on the east side of The Chine (Nos. 10-16); and the two houses Nos. 18 & 20 The Chine were approved later in the year. All of these houses were designed by W B Collins and he was at last permitted to dispense with the party walls



Fig. 3.34 *Original plans North side Cranmore Way.*



Fig. 3.35 *Cranmore Way North side.*



Fig. 3.42 *Rookfield Close.*

projecting beyond roof level. His brother Herbert, who had been living at No.31 Rookfield Avenue, maybe despairing of the attitude of the hidebound Hornsey Council, in 1922 moved to Southampton and carried out a number of ground breaking housing developments possibly benefitting from the lessons learnt on the Rookfield Estate. In the mid-Twenties W B Collins built three houses in The Chine, Westwood, Shalfleet and No 2, which although not strictly part of the Estate, are built on part of the land originally acquired in 1899.

There was little further activity, as the Estate was almost complete until 1934, when the tennis club was truncated and the houses Nos. 57 to 69

Etheldene Avenue were built (Fig. 3.45). These are seven houses of a design unique on the Estate being designed to give the appearance of five larger houses. The final houses Nos. 2 to 8 Cascade Avenue, complete with urns, were built in 1934 (Fig. 3.48). The site had been left undeveloped because the difficult ground conditions meant that these houses required special foundations. They were situated on part of the site where there had originally been a pond and the ground in the area must have been incapable of supporting normal foundations. For this reason the five houses in The Court are set back from Cascade Avenue. However, in the early post-war period



Fig. 3.43 *Cascade Avenue East side Right-hand house lowered to follow the slope of the ground.*



Fig. 3.44 *Cascade Avenue East side. House balcony overlooking the tennis courts.*



Fig. 3.45 Nos. 57 and 59 Etheldene Avenue.

W B Collins considered building two bungalows on the green in front of The Court. A sketch scheme was prepared and his note states that they would have to be built on a concrete raft with the drains in iron pipes. Fortunately for the character of the Estate and the amenities of the residents of The Court this proposal was not pursued.

From the early years applications to the Council were made from a number of addresses which appear to be houses in that part of the estate that was in the course of development. Apart from the applications made in the name of Herbert & Co., until 1913 applications for Bye-law approval were made in the name of W J Collins, some giving

the address as Rookfield. After the formation of the Rookfield Garden Village applications were usually made by W B Collins in the name of the RGV giving the address as Firs Parade which was, until the death of W B Collins in 1977, the Collins's estate office.

Although W J Collins carried out a considerable volume of work in the years 1880 to 1899, mainly in the Crouch End area, the rate of his developments increased throughout the first 40 years of the twentieth century. The Collins, father and sons, were extremely busy and the output of their collective efforts in London is astonishing. From 1901 to 1910 they were engaged in



Fig. 3.46 Cascade Avenue East side 1925.



Fig. 3.47 Cascade Avenue West side.



Fig. 3.48 The last houses in Cascade Avenue 1934.

building the Fortismere Estate at the same time as the development of Rookfield. The family built flats in Fortis Green Road and Fortis Green and Herbert built The Homestead in St. James Lane in 1912. W B Collins went on to design the further flats in Fortis Green and Twyford Avenue in the early Twenties. It would be fascinating to know their working methods, organisation and finances but unfortunately no records remain or at least none are available. They must have employed a very large workforce to produce so many houses in this time. From the Council minutes it appears that they erected temporary buildings as machine shops and probably made their joinery on site.

ROAD NAMES

It is interesting to speculate on why the various roads received their names. The first street Etheldene is presumably named after W J Collins's younger daughter Ethel with the addition of dene, which according to the Shorter Oxford Dictionary could mean a wooded vale. The name "Rookfield" is self-evident being taken from the house of that name. Initially The Chine was called Chine Road

and the length connecting to Cascade Avenue was called Glen Avenue. At some stage it acquired the definite article and the whole length became The Chine. Edwin Monk in his *Memories of Hornsey*²⁰ writes that when he first came to live in Cranley Gardens in a recently built house in 1908, "our view across to Shepherds Hill was unobstructed by houses, and the Chine *was* a chine, with shady trees and a running brook." His photograph shows a relatively placid brook but presumably the fall down the slope from what is now Linden Road, from which the stream would have joined the other tributary near the present houses, Westwood and Shalfleet, was of sufficient volume to justify the appellation of both the Chine and Cascade. The source of the name Cranmore is uncertain. There is a village of that name in Somerset, near Shepton Mallet and also one on the Isle of Wight. My preference is for the former as it was given to the road, previously named Grove Avenue, in about 1913 and may well have been known to W B Collins in his early motoring days perhaps in search of a picturesque village on which to practise his watercolour painting skills.

²⁰ *Memories of Hornsey* by Edwin Monk Published by HHS 1978. Revised 3rd edition 2005.