

# Building Report Pleasant Harbour, Kidderminster

**Author:** Nigel Gilbert

**Date:** 8<sup>th</sup> March 2009

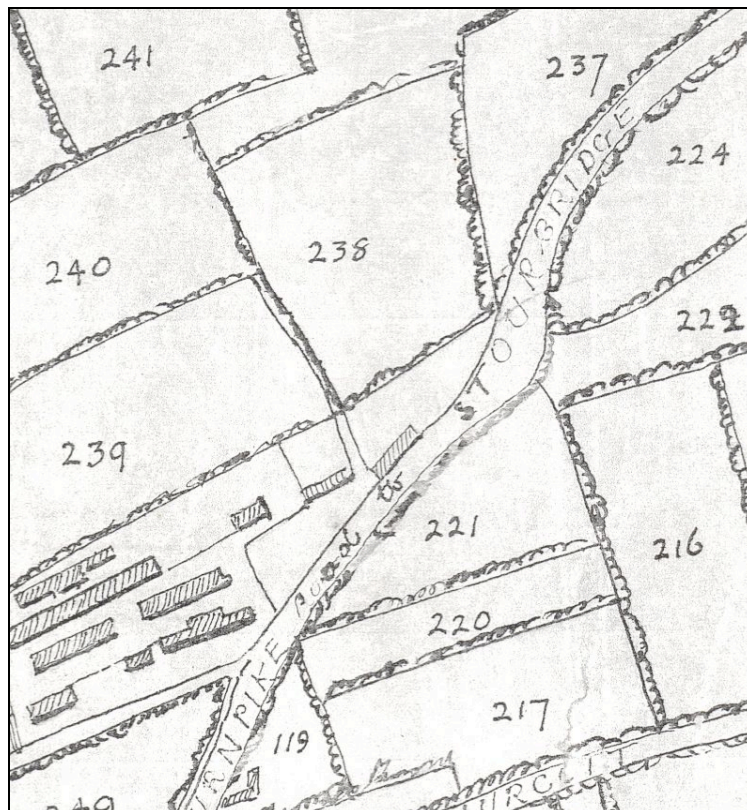
**Historic Kidderminster Project Ref:** 780

## Introduction

This report was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. Pleasant Harbour is of interest as one of the town's nineteenth century streets which have completely disappeared due to redevelopment. The properties were subject of compulsory purchase orders in the early 1960s and demolished. The report is based on deeds held by Wyre Forest District Council and kindly made available to the Project. (Ref: DP 435, 443, 466, 488, 691, 700etc)

## Sale of Plots and Early History

The origins of Pleasant Harbour lie in the purchase of land in May 1827 by James Rogers, victualler, and Paul Hughes, gentleman, both of Kidderminster. This was a piece of land sold by the executors of the will of John Cooper.



**A detail from 1780 Sherriff map, showing field 221 which was where Pleasant Harbour was ultimately built. Field 238 is where Lark Hill would be built. The buildings shown may include the 'aristocratic' houses mentioned by Guest, one becoming the home of Paul Hughes.**

Paul Hughes was described in one of Ebenezer Guest's articles. He lived in the third house in Queen Street, which then had 'quite an aristocratic entrance'. He kept a carriage and man servant. (Kidderminster Shuttle 8.4.1905)) He was active in buying land in this area of Kidderminster. He owned the land on which Lark Hill was built and died in 1843. (WRO BA7404) He was styled as Esquire in Pleasant Harbour deeds by 1835. By then his partner James Rogers had been elevated to "gentleman".

Probably the most interesting part of the development took place at the on the north-east side of the end of the cul-de-sac. Here two plots staked out by the vendors covering 748 square yards were sold in September 1827 to a Kidderminster tailor, George Murless. By January 1828, with the aid of £250 borrowed from a dissenting minister from Bewdley, George Brooks, Murless was building six houses and an eight loom carpet factory at the back of them. These houses were originally numbered 1 to 6 Pleasant Harbour, and at the time of his will dated 1847 Murless occupied number 1 at the end of the road. He died in January 1849, leaving number 1 to the children of his son, Samuel, one house to each of his four daughters, and one plus the carpet factory to his executors. A large gravestone in St. George's churchyard commemorates George Murless, who died aged 70, and his wife Elizabeth, who died in 1865 aged 84.

Also sold in September 1827 by Rogers and Hughes were two pieces of land to Simon Starr, bombazine weaver, for £72. The industry, which was located in this area of town, was in decline at this time and it is possible Hughes was using his wealth to encourage weavers to engage in a little land speculation as an alternative means of living. These plots were on the south of the road just before the sharp corner in the middle of Pleasant Harbour. Starr was living in Pleasant Harbour in 1851 as a packer of goods in a screw warehouse, probably in what was to be number 5. Four houses were built on the plots, being those numbered 3, 4 and 5 in later years, with one at the back. The ultimate standing of the Starr family is interesting. In 1883 a Jacob Starr of Kings Road Chelsea died leaving George Barrand Starr of Stratford Essex, gentleman, entitled to the residue of his estate. This included the four Pleasant Harbour houses. In 1902 George, described as a gentleman of Pleasant Harbour, sold the four houses for £200 to Mrs Mira Guest, wife of Ebenezer Guest. At those prices no gentleman would want to be living in Pleasant Harbour. (In 1898, for example, four terraced houses in Peel Street were sold for £800.)

In November 1829 the two vendors sold another plot extending to 240 square yards to Thomas Baker, bricklayer for £42. This was on the south side of Pleasant Harbour at its junction with Stourbridge Road. Baker had certainly built four houses on the two roads by 1836. They included numbers 1 and 2 Pleasant Harbour. The 1851 census indicates that the house on the corner fronting Stourbridge Road was occupied by Ebenezer Guest and his then wife, Hannah. The multi-talented Guest was listed as Bailiff of the County Court, grocer and accountant.



**Detail of Pleasant Harbour from OS map surveyed 1883, with some house numbers added. Queen Street can be seen emerging from the bottom left.**

On the same day another plot of 265 square yards was sold to John Garlick maltster for £40. This was a plot adjoining that purchased by George Murless, which lay beyond it at the north east end of the road. Perhaps the intervening seven years saw a drop in the market price of land in the town. In 1836 Garlick sold on at a loss to Edward Nicholls, carpenter for £32 14s. By 1841 Nicholls was borrowing £100 by way of mortgage and had already built two houses. In 1843 Nicholls borrowed a further £60, by which time the property consisted of four houses with a carpenter's shop, outbuildings and erections in the occupation of Nicholls and his tenants. (By 1904 the four houses were numbered 8, 9, and 10, with one at the rear of the dwellings.) The 1851 census shows Nicholls no longer living at Pleasant Harbour and certainly by 1862 he was living in Wolverhampton where he worked as a carpenter.

Hughes and Rogers delayed selling at least one of the plots. In 1835 they sold a plot of 271 square yards to James Smith, a bombazine weaver, for £49. By 1844 there was a house on it, owned by a victualler, Robert Preston who made his will in that year. (House agent 1851 census Stourbridge Street) He died in 1854. His widow sold the property to a labourer Benjamin Turner for £100. He bequeathed the house to his widow, Maria, who in 1907 was living in Broad Street. The house, by then numbered 18, was void and falling into dilapidation.

In 1835 the latter plot was bounded on the north by land belonging to John Dukes. This became number 17, and like number 18 retained substantial ground around it until demolition in the 1960s.

## **Character of Area and Later History**

The houses in Pleasant Harbour, of which no photographs have been found, seem to have been generally terraced houses of modest size and condition to judge by their value in the poor rate lists. The best house, valued at £12 in 1879, was the house built by George Murless as his residence, by then numbered 16. (WRO BA10470/230) It would appear that the houses numbered 17 and 18 were small. Even with their land, they were valued only at £8 15s and £9 5s respectively.

We do not know what the large yards surrounding the latter two houses were used for. The tenant of number 18 in 1879 was Benjamin Turner, who in his younger days had been a labourer and at the 1881 census was a wood stoveman. So his ground was probably not put to business use. The information for number 17 is more interesting. In the 1881 census the occupier of number 17 was a boatman, William Cox. He is shown by the 1879 poor rate lists to have been the tenant of both 16 and 17. This raises the possibility of a continuing boat building business in the locality. There was a boat builder, William Bishop, at Lark Hill between 1843 and 1851, who purchased land from Paul Hughes' widow. (WRO BA7404) Perhaps the naming of Pleasant Harbour derived from such connections.

There were large yards also around number 2 Pleasant Harbour right up to the 1960s. Judging by the 1851 census this was a coal yard at that time occupied by a coal dealer John Waldron.

The deeds available to us show that for the most part the houses of Pleasant Harbour were owned by absentee landlords. We may suppose that their condition was often neglected and that improvements were not made. This led to their clearance in the 1960s. For example, the six Murless houses, numbered 11-16, were acquired by Louisa and Joseph Hale in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, before being sold to Ellis Talbot in 1935 for £545. Numbers 12-16 were sold on in 1945 to Francis Martin. Numbers 1 and 2, together with three houses fronting Stourbridge Road were held en bloc by landlords until 1964. The same is true of 3, 4 and 5 (with the house behind them), which were held together with a row of houses at the rear in Coalfield Row. Numbers 8, 9 and 10 (again with a house behind them) were held between 1922 and 1963 by a family of builders called Lacy.



**Part of estate which replaced Pleasant Harbour in 1960s**

### **Clearance of Pleasant Harbour**

The compulsory purchase powers seem to have been used in two groups. The first group included numbers 4, 5 and 9-16. These houses were subject to the Borough of Kidderminster (Hurcott Road Clearance) Compulsory Order 1961 dated 17<sup>th</sup> April 1961 made by the Corporation in pursuance of powers conferred by s43(3) of the Housing Act 1957 and confirmed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government 7<sup>th</sup> February 1962.

John Henry Lacy, builder of Kidderminster, received a relatively good price of £1150 for his four houses numbers 8, 9 and 10 with one at the back. Mrs Talbot received only £650 for three houses, those numbered 14 to 16. The clearest loss was sustained by Mrs A. Gummery, also an absentee landlord, who in 1957 had purchased number 12 for £400. Her investment did not pay off as she had hoped, and she was given only £136 for the property when sale to the corporation was completed in October 1964.

The other group of houses included numbers 1 and 2, and also number 18. These were subject to the Borough of Kidderminster (Hurcott Road Clearance) (Number 2) Compulsory Order 1962 dated 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1962 made by the Corporation in pursuance of powers conferred by s43(3) of the Housing Act 1957 and confirmed by the Minister of Housing and Local Government 20<sup>th</sup> February 1963.

The electoral registers show that by October 1963 there were residents only at 2, 3, 18, 19 and 21 Pleasant Harbour. By the following year Pleasant Harbour had ceased to appear on the list. The site became part of a large new estate of blocks of flats.



Pleasant Harbour 1921 – OS Ref 835774