

Building Report

47 Roden Avenue, Kidderminster

Author: Nigel Gilbert

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Introduction

This report was undertaken as part of the Historic Kidderminster Project. This house is of great interest, being on land developed by the Avenue Road Land Society founded in 1877. The involvement with this society of one of the town's most eminent physicians, Dr William Roden, provides added interest. There are many attractive well-built houses in this road. The early ones were built following the establishment of the society. This house is later. It was built c1899-1901 with its adjoining house number 49 Roden Avenue. Resources at both Kidderminster Library and Worcester Record Office have been used. We have also had access to documents held by the present owners, Jeff and Julie Leek.



Numbers 47 and 49 Roden Avenue pictured in 2008

History

Land in this area of Kidderminster was acquired by William Lea in a major purchase of land from John Jefferys in 1817, when he paid £4850 5s. (WRO BA 5278/38) Lea was the son of the Kidderminster cloth manufacturer, William Lea of the Shrubbery. Some of this land was undoubtedly the subject of a transaction on 25th June 1877, whereby William Roden and others mortgaged land to obtain a loan of £3500 from Rev. William Lea of Droitwich and John Wildman Thomas Lea of Netherton House, Bewdley. Rev. Lea was the son of the second William Lea. Presumably Roden and his colleagues purchased the land from the Lea family by means of the mortgage loan. £3500 may represent the full purchase price. (Deeds of 8 Roden Avenue.)

The three mortgagers of the land were Dr William Roden, Erdman Friedrich Bernhard Boese, jeweller, and George Southall, boot manufacturer, all of Kidderminster. There is no reference to the Avenue Road Society in this document, but it was rare for the name of a land society to appear as a party to deeds of conveyance. Societies preferred to act through trustees. (p81, Cleary, 1965) However, we know that the Avenue Road Land Society existed because it is referred to in deeds of adjacent property at 348 Hurcott Road. The society is described as owning land to the east of this property. Also we are lucky to have a copy of the rules of the society lent to us by a private individual. This shows that Roden, Boese and Southall were the trustees.

The function of land societies was to enable its members to purchase the individual building plots of land carved out of a larger piece purchased by the society. A typical society might have run for twelve or thirteen years with members paying contributions before being wound up. The responsibility for actually building a house on the plot lay with the individual. If he or she could not afford it, then the plot lay empty, sometimes for many years. This seems to have been the case here. Jeff and Julie Leek's documents give a history from 1899 when building was about to start.



Rear of number 47 showing the substantial rear extension

The builder of numbers 47 and 49 was Mr John Godwin Probert of Cherry Orchard Kidderminster, carpet designer. In 1899 he borrowed £650 from Mrs Sarah Follows Smith of Lorne St Kidderminster widow by way of a mortgage on the property.

On 2nd May 1901 the property was reconveyed to him, but he promptly remortgaged. This time he borrowed £700 from William Hartland of Blackstone near Bewdley, farmer. The document describes the property as ‘that piece of land having a frontage of 13_ yards to Roden Avenue bounded on the north by land of Arthur Tanner on the south by land of William Bowen on the west by land of William Coxon’. It contained 830 sq yds. Furthermore the property included ‘all those two messuages or dwelling houses lately erected by the said John Godwin Probert being now in the occupations of Rev David Oakley and R.V. Lea.’ He had finished the houses in time for them to be included on the 1902 OS map.

Probert’s borrowing to invest does not seem to have paid off. In Feb 1909 his lender, William Hartland, sold number 49 to Thirza June Jelf. This house was then known as “Silkmore”. Worse was to follow. Hartland died in 1911 with a principal sum of £300 still owing. In August 1912 his executors sold number 47 to Mr John Boyle JP of Kidderminster for £335. The house was described as that ‘messuage known as Ivydene erected by John Godwin Probert formerly in occupation of Rev David Oakley but now of Mrs Hannah Starr.’

Boyle and his wife evidently moved into the house. He was living there when he died in 1916. In January 1918 his widow, Mrs Bridget Boyle, sold Ivydene to Mrs Harriet Greenwood, wife of postmaster George Greenwood of Chester Road, for £490. This was a very brief purchase. In May 1919 Mrs Greenwood sold on to George Alfred Greenland of Cheltenham for £590.

There may have been a post office connection in the latter transaction. In October 1945 Greenland, who by then lived in Roden Avenue, was described as a retired Post Office Engineer when selling the house, which was then numbered 12. His purchaser was Philip Digby Griffiths of 192 Comberton Road, medical practitioner, at a price of £1750.

Description

Number 47 is one of a pair of semi-detached houses built in red-brick with a slate roof. They are single bay and their rather narrow frontages are offset by substantial extensions at the rear and slightly to the side. In fact these extensions contain the front doors. The houses are elegantly adorned with a string course and detailed window heads.

