

# **Building Report**

## **8 Roden Avenue, Kidderminster**

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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. 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 Victorian houses in this road, and number 8 is one of them. It was built c1880 with its adjoining house, number 10 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 owner, Christine Ensor.



**8 (on the left) and 10 Roden Avenue in 2007**

### **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 25<sup>th</sup> 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.

The three mortgagers of the land were Dr William Roden, Erdman Friedrich Bernhard Boese, jeweller, and George Southall, boot manufacturer, all of Kidderminster. On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1880 they sold the plot of land on which no. 8 Roden Avenue was to be built to Thomas Doughty, jeweller of Kidderminster, for £53 5s 9d. The land was referred to as lot 54, presumably of the Society land though no mention of the Society is made. The plot is described as having a frontage of ten yards to the east side of Avenue Road and containing 609 square yards. It was sold free of mortgage. The sum of £1700 still owed from the original £3500 loan, but the mortgagees were satisfied to use as security the remaining unsold land.

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 rules provided for Dr Roden to have five shares for lots adjoining his property at Morningside. The 1881 census shows that Roden, who died in 1884, had indeed moved into a house on the Avenue called Morningside Villa.



**Rear of house in 2007**

Doughty's purchase was described as bounded on the north by land of James Coates. The two men were to collaborate by building a pair of semi-detached houses. By November 1880 the houses were 'erected or in the course of erection' according to a mortgage deed whereby Doughty borrowed £200. In August 1883 Doughty's house was definitely finished when he switched his mortgage to the Kidderminster Permanent Benefit Building Society.

The visitor to Roden Avenue today will see a high class neighbourhood, and that is how it was conceived by the Avenue Road Society. The conveyance to Doughty contained a clause that he 'will not erect any building other than a private dwelling house or houses of the value of at least £250 for a single house or £400 for two semis'. In addition, 'such dwelling houses shall be erected only in a line fronting the said Avenue Road at a distance of 13 yards from the centre thereof except bay windows porches or fences'.

By June 1895 Doughty was dead, and his widow was further mortgaging the property. The house is here first referred to as 'Sneinton Villa', derived from the Nottinghamshire village where Thomas had been born in 1849. In January 1904 she sold the house to Frederick Smith of Kidderminster, carpet pattern designer. She received £182, but still owed the mortgage of £230, so the value of the house was £412.

### **Description**

This is a well-built red-brick semi, with ample frontage as required by rules of the society. The main access is through a side porch, which seems to be as originally built, and it is unaffected by a modern extension to its rear. Number 10 was its mirror image, sharing a tall chimney, although the symmetry has now been reduced by both houses having their own extensions.

One curiosity is that each house has an initialled stone near to its entrance. In the case of number 10, it clearly refers to James Coates who built the house and was still living there at the 1901 census. However the similar stone at no. 8 provides us with a mystery as it has 'W.H.D.' This cannot even be the initials of Thomas' widow who was Selina Maria.

### **Bibliography**

E. J. Cleary, The Building Society Movement, 1965.

