

IN THE BEGINNING.....

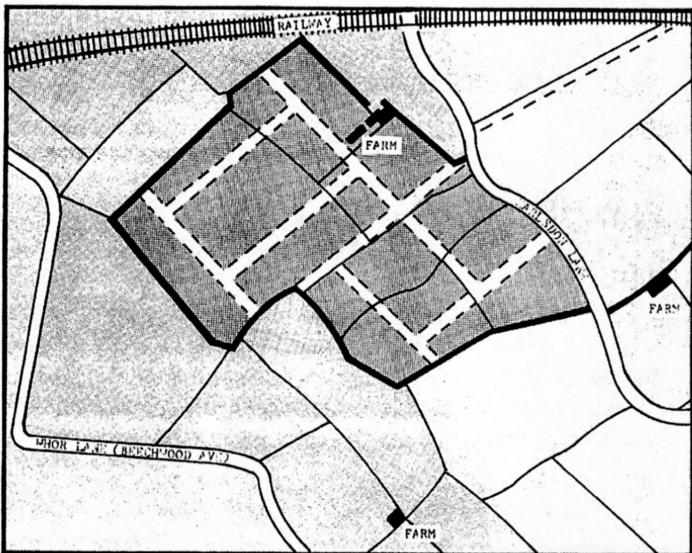
Our thanks to local historian Mary Montes, who contributed the following article:

One of the most frequently asked questions about the history of Earlsdon is, "Was Earlsdon ever a real little village going back hundreds of years?" and most people seem quite disappointed at the answer "No!" One hundred and fifty years ago the only habitations in the area were three small farms surrounded by the unspoilt countryside of fields and commons. Then in 1852 an area of some thirty acres was bought up for development as a housing estate. By providing some two hundred and fifty new homes this rural site, it was hoped, would go some way to easing the housing situation in the City, which was desperately overcrowded at the time. It was a commonplace enough beginning, but at the same time part of a very interesting project.

When in 1847 a Birmingham man, James Taylor, went to vote in the General Election of that year, he was appalled at the number of capable looking men just standing around watching the proceedings. They didn't own any property, and so under the franchise laws of the time, they couldn't vote. To Taylor this seemed a great pity and he devised a plan whereby with some financial help, these humble working men could each buy a small piece of land, build a house on it and so qualify as a potential vote holder. Apart from obtaining a political voice, of course, he was also providing a good permanent home for himself and his family.

With backing from the Liberal party - of course it became a quasi political enterprise - the project took off, the Freehold Land Society was born and quickly spread across the country. Under a very complicated financial transaction, parcels of land were bought up on which roads were laid out, drainage and water supplies laid on and plots of land marked out. These were then offered for sale on the open market to anyone who could afford the simple repayments of two or three shillings a week.

The Coventry branch of the Freehold Land Society started operations in 1848 with Freehold Street, offer-



ing only twenty nine building plots. Other sites followed with Earlsdon four years later in 1852 when an area of six small fields, previously the property of John Moore, a City farmer and butcher, came on the market. It was bought by the Trustees of the Society for £4,000.

Development started straight away, with a water supply laid on from the Artesian well in Spon End, and a drainage system to take away the sink waste and surface rain water. (Until a proper sewage disposal system was put into operation about fifty years later, it was the privy at the bottom of the garden for all Earlsdon residents!) Eight little streets each 38 feet wide were laid out and when all was ready, the 251 building plots which had been fenced off were put up for sale.

Take-up was slow to begin with because although beloved by City folk for Sunday afternoon rambles along shady lanes and across the flower filled fields and commons, for most of them it was too remote and rural for living and working in. However, according to the census of 1861, nine years later, 107 houses had been built, scattered around eight streets and the first Earlsdon residents had settled in. Earlsdon was now firmly on the map and the seeds of community sown.

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EARLSDON STREET TRADERS

As we go to print, the matter of Christmas lights in Earlsdon Street remains unresolved. John Gibberd, Chairman of the Association, is presently waiting for a quote from a local firm which will then have to be agreed by participating traders. It is expected that about 20 shops in the area between Moor Street and Providence Street will have illuminated Christmas trees.

The reconstruction of the pavement on the north side of Earlsdon Street is another unresolved matter. The association hopes to meet with the Council in the New Year.

MERRY CHRISTMAS and Good Health in the New Year



THANK YOU FOR OUR LIVELIHOOD
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